



Jonathan Dunleavy

Partner

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Jonathan Dunleavy represents clients in a broad range of insurance cases, from the most basic slip-and-fall matters to more-complex, multi-party wrongful death and high-dollar property claims. He focuses his practice on admiralty and maritime law, and advises clients in claims relating to insurance defense, USCG administrative proceedings, products liability, subrogation and construction defect claims. With a career spanning more than 25 years, Jonathan has successfully tried cases in state and federal courts.

Jonathan is passionate about providing counsel to his clients using an individualized approach, taking the time to listen and to carefully assess each case. He is a sought-after speaker and is routinely invited to present at various notable industry events, including the Fort Lauderdale Mariners Club Seminar, Tampa Bay Mariners Seminar and the Southeastern Admiralty Law Institute Annual Seminar. For more than a decade, Jonathan has been an adjunct professor at the University of Miami, where he teaches public speaking. He also is an active member of various organizations, serving on the boards of directors and holding several high offices.

Education

- Thomas M. Cooley Law School (J.D., 1997)
- Michigan State University (B.S. Environmental Science / Public Relations, 1994)

Bar Admissions

- Florida
- Illinois

Court Admissions

Services

- Admiralty & Marine
- Product Liability, Prevention & Government Compliance

- U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit
- U.S. District Court, Northern District of Florida
- U.S. District Court, Middle District of Florida
- U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida

Professional Affiliations

- Fort Lauderdale Mariners Club, Seminar Committee, 2011–present
- Miami Dade County Bar Association

Awards & Honors

Selected for inclusion in Best Lawyers in America, Admiralty and Maritime Law, 2024

Client Wins

Dunleavy and Kaplan Secure No-Liability Verdict in Fatal Jet Ski Collision Case

Jonathan H. Dunleavy (Partner-Miami) and Katherine E. Kaplan (Associate-Miami) secured a defense verdict in Miami-Dade County Circuit Court, Florida, with the jury finding no liability on the part of Wilson Elser’s clients in a maritime case involving a fatality. The plaintiff brought this action on behalf of the estate of a decedent, who was a passenger on a jet ski (PWC) and was killed in a collision with a 46-foot Scarab vessel owned by our clients and operated by their employed captain through the clients’ yacht company.

The court entered default judgment against several co-defendants – including the PWC operator, the PWC rental company, the rental company’s owner, and related yacht entities – finding their negligence to be a legal cause of the decedent’s injuries and death.

The plaintiff nonetheless pursued claims against our clients, the Scarab’s captain, its owners, and their yacht company, alleging that the captain negligently operated the vessel by failing to maintain a proper lookout, operate at a safe speed, avoid the collision, yield to the PWC, and render aid. The plaintiff further alleged that the vessel owner contributed to the collision through modifications to the vessel, and that the yacht company was vicariously liable for the captain’s conduct.

On behalf of our clients, Jonathan and Katherine disputed liability, maintaining that the captain acted reasonably under the circumstances and that any competent boater would have taken his actions; the yacht company was not vicariously liable, and the owner’s actions did not cause or contribute to the collision. They further asserted that the negligence of the parties in default and, in part, the decedent caused the incident. Framing the case through a “red light/green light” theme, Jonathan and Katherine emphasized that under navigation rules, the PWC was the give way vessel and should have altered course,

i.e., had the red light. The Scarab was the stand on vessel with the green light and had the right of way.