



William J. Katt

Senior Counsel

william.katt@wilsonelser.com

Milwaukee, WI – 414.292.3018

William Katt handles the defense of wrongful death and serious injury claims brought against major airlines, product manufacturers, charter operators, fixed-base operators, maintenance facilities and a host of other aviation-related companies. Bill represents the three largest airlines in the United States and serves as the lead counsel for the largest defense contractor, the largest helicopter operator and one of the largest fixed-base operators in the United States. He is nationally known in the aviation litigation community and generally recognized as one of the top aviation defense lawyers in the country.

Bill focuses his practice entirely on defending businesses, insurers and individuals in the aviation community who are sued in civil litigation. His practice is national in scope, as he is routinely hired to represent clients in complex litigation on a prodigious array of matters throughout the country. Bill is called on by aviation-related companies to defend their insureds regardless of the venue or location, and has been hailed as the go-to trial counsel for related death and serious injury cases.

Bill is often called on to parachute in as lead counsel in matters that are already in litigation and have become problematic. He has handled aviation cases as lead attorney in 38 states, having been admitted pro hac vice in a number of state and federal courts, including Alabama, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Virginia.

Litigation Précis

Lead counsel in more than 100 jury trials to verdict, Bill has defended thousands of civil litigation matters in state and federal courts and has extensive arbitration and appellate experience. Aided by his involvement with a wide array of substantive, procedural and evidentiary legal issues, Bill has the ability to quickly analyze a situation and produce decisive strategies to resolve a dispute. His position as a Fellow of the American College

Services

- Aviation & Aerospace
- National Trial Team

of Trial Lawyers, an organization composed of the best of the trial bar from the United States and Canada and widely considered to be the premier professional trial organization in America, speaks volumes about his status among adversaries and before the bar. Bill was a founding shareholder and president of his previous firm.

Bill received the 2024 Max Edelman Lawyer of the Year Award, Wilson Elser's highest individual award given to an attorney who over a sustained period of years has consistently demonstrated the highest levels of excellence and exemplified our core values through actions and results, outstanding legal work, a focus on client service and a selfless commitment to the firm.

Aviation

Bill is a national trial attorney who is routinely called on by aviation-related companies to defend their insureds regardless of the venue or location. In this role he handles the defense of wrongful death and serious injury claims brought against major airlines, product manufacturers, charter operators, fixed-base operators, maintenance facilities and a host of other aviation-related companies. Bill represents the three largest airlines in the United States, as well as one of the two largest operators of helicopters and the nation's largest military contractor. He has been hailed as the go-to trial counsel for death and serious injury cases.

Education

- Marquette University Law School (J.D.)
- Calvin University (B.A.)

Bar Admissions

- Wisconsin
- Illinois
- Minnesota

Court Admissions

- Supreme Court of the United States
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit
- U.S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois
- U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Wisconsin
- U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin

Professional Affiliations

- DRI: The Voice of the Defense Bar
- American College of Trial Lawyers, fellow

- Helicopter Association International
- International Association of Defense Counsel, Member Product Liability Committee, 1997-2019

Awards & Honors

- Selected for inclusion in *The Best Lawyers in America*®, 2023-2026
- American College of Trial Lawyers, fellow
- Selected for inclusion in Wisconsin *Super Lawyers*®, 2005–2022
- AV® Rated by Martindale-Hubbell
- *Wisconsin Law Journal*, Leader in the Law 2015
- Featured in Super Lawyers November 2011 Publication *Flying Colors*
- Received Defense Research Institute State Leadership Award, 2001

Representative Matters

Aviation

Successfully defended a major air carrier in the first class action ever certified against a domestic airline.

Retained as defense counsel in numerous high-profile aircraft accidents, including litigation involving the death of a Chicago radio personality and the crashes of several helicopters, including those used in medical transport.

Obtained summary judgment dismissal for international defense/government contractor in high-profile general aviation accident.

Obtained dismissal of negligent flight instruction claims against flight school, a dismissal upheld by Minnesota Supreme Court.

Product Liability

Defended numerous product liability lawsuits against manufacturers of such products as cooling towers, ladders, cigarette lighters, dairy equipment and underground storage tank equipment.

Represented a wire manufacturer named as defendant in one litigation arising out of the Air France crash off the shores of Brazil in June 2009.

Client Wins

Katt and Melvani Obtain Dismissal of Aviation Matter on Forum non Conveniens

William Katt (Partner-Milwaukee, WI) and Nicole Melvani (Partner-McLean, VA) obtained dismissal of an aviation matter filed in Palm Beach County, Florida, on forum non conveniens grounds. The case arose out of an airplane crash in Connecticut, which resulted in multiple claims of death, personal injury, and property damage. Seven individual lawsuits were filed in Connecticut against multiple parties. The aircraft manufacturer settled one of the Connecticut lawsuits and then filed a complaint seeking contribution, indemnification, and equitable subrogation against our client in Florida, where the aircraft owner had its principal place of business, actively seeking to avoid litigating the matter in Connecticut and contesting the existence of personal jurisdiction in the remaining actions. Bill and Nicole filed a Motion to Dismiss for forum non conveniens, arguing that Connecticut was the more appropriate forum. The plaintiff manufacturer opposed the motion, arguing that it had appropriately filed suit in the aircraft owner's hometown and arguing that the plaintiff's choice of forum is entitled to great deference. The plaintiff manufacturer also argued the Connecticut state court did not have personal jurisdiction over the plaintiff given it was contesting personal jurisdiction in the remaining actions pending there, and argued it would be prejudiced if it was forced to re-file in Connecticut because it could be found to have waived its personal jurisdiction defenses in the other matters. After considering all of the requisite factors, the Court agreed with Bill and Nicole and granted the Motion to Dismiss, entering an Order that substantively mirrored the draft Order they prepared and submitted to the Court. The Court dismissed the matter without prejudice to plaintiff to re-file in Connecticut within a limited period of time.

Katt and Melvani Prevail in Hard-Fought Aviation Case

William Katt (Partner-Milwaukee, WI) with the help of Nicole Melvani (Partner-McLean, VA) secured a significant defense victory on behalf of a aircraft component manufacturer following a multi-week jury trial in an aviation matter in Rhode Island Superior Court. Wilson Elser was called to assume lead and trial counsel role after the case had been pending for several years. The plaintiff alleged our client's bushings, a small part used in aircraft engines, failed to conform to design specifications and that the client falsified material certifications. The plaintiff further alleged the bushings migrated inside aircraft engines during operation, causing engine failure. The FAA issued a safety bulletin, mandating a recall for inspection and replacement of bushings. The plaintiff brought claims for breach of contract and several related claims. The plaintiff sought approximately \$7.5 million in damages plus punitive damages and pre-judgment interest at 12 percent, including approximately \$2.5 million in compensatory damages associated with the recall and another \$5 million in consequential damages associated with settlement payments to third parties, which included a \$4.5 million settlement payment to passengers who were severely injured when their sightseeing helicopter crashed in California due to engine failure. Prior to trial, Wilson Elser secured summary judgment in the client's favor on the indemnification count. The remaining counts were tried to a jury. Although the plaintiffs asked for \$7.5 million from the jury, their settlement demands during trial were significantly more because they claimed 12 percent pre-judgment interest running from at least 2017. The jury found in favor of Wilson Elser's client on all counts except for breach of the implied warranties of merchantability and fitness for particular purpose. The jury awarded the plaintiff less than \$1.5 million in damages, thereby accepting the defense's theory that the California accident did not involve a bushing manufactured by Wilson Elser's client and that the claimed recall damages included unsupported expenses. Because the jury found

there was no intentional misrepresentation by the firm's client, the court dismissed the plaintiff's punitive damage claim as a matter of law. The verdict was significantly less than the demands made by the plaintiff during trial. Additionally, throughout the litigation and trial, the plaintiff's primary focus was on the breach of contract and intentional misrepresentation claims, both of which were rejected by the jury.

Katt and Melvani Obtain Unanimous Defense Verdict for Fixed-Base Operator in Aircraft Crash Case

William Katt (Senior Counsel-Milwaukee, WI) and Nicole Melvani (Of Counsel-McLean, VA) with the able assistance of paralegal Rachel Swords, obtained a unanimous defense verdict in favor of Wilson Elser's client in an aviation matter that was tried before a federal jury in the U.S. District Court in Miami, Florida. The case involved a charter aircraft that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean about five miles from its intended destination in the Bahamas. The passenger and pilot survived and were rescued from the water. The passenger contended he suffered severe and permanent injuries, and filed suit against the pilot, the pilot's employer and Wilson Elser's client, a fixed-base operator (FBO) that fueled the aircraft. The plaintiff contended our client negligently fueled the "wrong" tanks in the aircraft, which caused or contributed to the accident. The jury found zero causal negligence on behalf of the FBO and returned a defense verdict in our client's favor. The jury found the pilot and his employer to be responsible for 80 percent of the plaintiff's injuries and awarded the plaintiff approximately \$2.9 million in damages against the pilot and the charter company. The jury also found the plaintiff to be 20 percent responsible for his own injuries. The jury found the FBO to have zero liability for the accident and the plaintiff's injuries. The jury rendered a unanimous verdict in the FBO's favor within a few hours of closing arguments.