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Michigan Powerhouse: Varnum

By Carolyn Muyskens

Law360 (September 3, 2025, 4:00 PM EDT) -- Varnum LLP has had another strong year as one of Michigan's leading law firms, helping to close deals in the boardroom, notching notable appellate wins and serving as a trusted resource for clients in a fast-changing regulatory environment.

The firm's transactional work across a variety of industries and courtroom victories, such as securing the dismissal of a businessman's federal criminal charges, are among the achievements that landed Varnum on Law360's Regional Powerhouses list for 2025.

With its home base in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the firm was founded in 1888, Varnum has stayed close to its roots. According to the firm, 178 of its 185 attorneys are based in Michigan at its offices in Ann Arbor, Birmingham, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and Novi.

"Varnum is a firm with accelerating momentum," said Jon M. Bylsma, the firm's chair. "We're meeting sustained demand really across our core areas of transactions, litigation and investigations, and our private client services. The legal landscape is increasingly competitive, and those areas continue to shine."

Varnum saw a busy year for mergers and acquisitions, where its deal teams routinely find themselves sitting across the table from BigLaw firms.

The firm recently represented food companies Cole's Quality Foods Inc. and Hammond's Candies in their sales to private-equity portfolio companies Furlani Foods and Lolli & Pops, respectively. A Varnum deal team also advised Xtreme Powerline Construction Inc. in its \$73 million sale to private equity-owned Aecon Utilities.

In the real estate sector, Varnum was trusted by healthcare real estate firm Davis to assist with a \$72 million acquisition of an outpatient medical center complex in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area last fall, one of the largest single-asset real estate sales in the Twin Cities that year.

And Varnum continued its long-standing relationship with Grand Rapids-based Acrisure LLC, a global fintech and insurance company, working alongside Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP as the company's legal advisers for a recently completed \$2.1 billion capital raise.



Varnum also worked on Acrisure's \$1.1 billion pending acquisition of Heartland Payroll Solutions in May, serving as Michigan counsel for Acrisure with Skadden and Kirkland & Ellis LLP as lead counsel.

The partnership with Acrisure is a "great testament to having a long-standing client that you continue to do excellent work for," Bylsma said, noting that over the years, Acrisure has called on Varnum attorneys for M&A, general corporate work and regulatory advice, as well as real estate, litigation services and privacy work.

The firm said it continues to invest in innovation in its home state, where it has offered millions of dollars in free legal services to startups through its MiSpringboard initiative.

One of Varnum's MiSpringboard clients, a Detroit-based real estate investment management platform called InvestNext, raised \$15 million in Series B funding with representation from Varnum earlier this year. The capital raise was the largest for an emerging company in Detroit in the first quarter of 2025.

Another Varnum-advised startup, Accel Digital Solutions, recently leaned on the firm to help it launch a quiet-play 3D-printed pickleball. The firm assisted with securing a strategic partnership with a Fortune 100 company to help Accel efficiently manufacture the product and provided intellectual property guidance.

"These are really great examples of startup work that becomes really successful," Bylsma said.

While Varnum is best known for transactional and corporate services work, its growing litigation team also delivered a series of impressive wins over the past year.

Last year, the firm persuaded a judge to dismiss the remaining federal tax charges against an owner of MRI businesses who had been accused of involvement in a scheme to solicit victims of car crashes for a range of legal and medical services. The win came after federal prosecutors had already dropped a wire fraud charge against Varnum's client, Cory Mann, in 2023.

This was "an extremely rare and outstanding result" that came from uncovering that false evidence had been submitted to the grand jury, Bylsma said.

In January, the firm's advocacy on behalf of alternative energy suppliers persuaded a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit to find a Michigan regulation requiring power companies to procure a small percentage of their power from local sources discriminates against out-of-state power companies.

The same appellate court handed Varnum client Tiara Yachts Inc. a significant ruling in May reviving allegations that Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, which managed Tiara's self-insured employee health plan, violated its fiduciary duty by overpaying claims.

Outside the courtroom, Varnum continues to build excitement around its national mobility and privacy practice, which "includes a wide range of experience involving data privacy, information security, liability, safety and regulatory compliance, and intellectual property," according to Scott Hill, Varnum's executive partner.

The firm said it is advising many of the leading autonomous vehicle players on their regulatory and privacy obligations.

While being near the automotive capital of the world is "an excellent home base for our mobility team," Hill said the "regulatory issues we work on span the entire country."

The firm prides itself on excellent client service, Bylsma said. The firm recently seized on an opportunity to meet clients' needs to stay on top of new and changing reporting obligations under the Corporate Transparency Act, a federal anti-money laundering law.

By providing rapid-response client alerts, the firm successfully cultivated a reputation as the place to go for updates while the law was in limbo due to court challenges, according to feedback Varnum got from clients.

As it looks to the future, the firm said it is setting itself up for success by focusing on aggressive lateral hiring and building a culture of shared purpose that talented lawyers want to be part of.

The firm also views adopting artificial intelligence tools as "nonnegotiable" to providing quality legal services going forward and said it is aggressively rolling out the technology and encouraging its use.

While Bylsma said AI is "not a tool for legal research" — a use case that has been plagued by stories of fake cases conjured by AI tools — the technology has proven useful as a time-saver for other legal tasks.

"I did not think that I would be a user, and I have found myself to really appreciate how it helps my practice," Bylsma said.

--Editing by Kristen Becker.