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Thinking of Practicing in Texas?

By Tim Regan, a Texas-based Legal Recruiter with ELR Legal Search

You might be considering positions in Texas due to its robust legal market and booming population growth. Texas has become one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Texas claims 5 of the 20 largest cities on the U.S. Census Bureau list (Houston at #4, Dallas at #9, Ft Worth at #12, Austin at #10, and San Antonio at #7). This is more than any other state! Each city has its own culture and market draw, which I'll outline below.

3 Major Legal Markets: Austin, Dallas, and Houston

When someone mentions Austin, most people think of a vibrant, funky town known for its music scene and laidback way of life. However, Austin is the state capital of Texas and has an attractive economy for startups and law firms. Austin has been named the #1 place to live in the U.S. by the U.S. News & World Report and is one of the fastest growing large cities in the U.S. according to the Census Bureau. Tech is dominant in Austin, led of course by companies like Dell and Apple. Apple is building a \$1 billion campus in Austin, which will employ upwards of 15,000 employees.

Though cliched, "everything is bigger in Texas" certainly rings true when speaking of Dallas. While it's not bigger than Houston, Dallas is the ninth largest city in the U.S., and when combined with Fort Worth, it is just as large, if not larger than Houston. Dallas has a substantial, diverse economy with considerable defense, financial services, tech, and transport sectors. Additionally, real estate is big in Dallas, and the majority of finance outside of oil and gas is in Dallas. More asset management firms, hedge funds, private equity firms, and family offices call Dallas home than any other city in Texas.

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. It has been growing since the 1960s when it became the home to NASA. Houston has also become the center of the U.S. oil and gas boom, and has been deemed the "Energy Capital of the World." As Houston continues to grow, however, so does the diversity of its industry and inhabitants. Houston now boasts the largest medical center in the world, a theater district rivaled only by New York City, forty colleges, and a broad industrial base in energy, aeronautics, technology, and more.

I wasn't born in Texas but got here as fast as I could!

Texas is home to a robust legal market that has attracted more than 60 national law firms to open offices in recent years, including Gibson Dunn, Willkie Farr, and Shearman & Sterling. This trend shows no sign of slowing any time soon. But don't jump to the conclusion that more

firms correlate directly with more jobs, however. Many of these firms have opened with attorneys from firms originating in Texas like Vinson & Elkins, Baker Botts, Fulbright & Jaworski (now Norton Rose Fulbright), and Andrews Kurth (now Hunton Andrews Kurth), just to name a few. There are of course more legal jobs than ever before in Texas which is a product of the huge demand for legal services post-Covid.

New entrants to any market translates to increased competition, resulting in opportunity. For Texas associates, this means they can choose between Texas-based firms or firms that may offer a client base centered entirely outside of Texas. One advantage associated with a non-native Texas firm may be the opportunity to work across offices on deals for clients in other types of industries not prevalent in the Lone Star State. Firms including Kirkland & Ellis, Latham & Watkins, and Winston & Strawn are part of the new national and global fabric of Texas. Each has proven their model works here, attracting some of the best lawyers in Texas and beyond.

Texas Roots!

Native Texas firms offer tremendous opportunity for new associates, even with a smaller footprint. Firms such as Baker Botts, Bracewell, Haynes & Boone, and Vinson & Elkins still claim a spot on the American Lawyer's Top 100 law firm list. These firms are proud to have their roots in Texas and tout their strong energy practices as jewels in their crowns.

If the "BigLaw" offerings aren't for you, there are many great regional and national firms to consider as well. Your long-term goals should dictate the firm where you begin your legal career. All firms are not created equally, and while large, global firms can offer a new associate unique perspective on the market and top compensation, there are many other choices. Firms including Jackson Walker, Porter Hedges, Thompson & Knight, and Winstead are excellent regional, full-service firms that provide great client exposure and experience for new attorneys. Spending time with a career advisor or mentor to align which would suit you best is time very well spent.

What are the Hot Practice Areas in Texas?

Corporate practices came back strong in Texas after the first signs of the pandemic two years ago and have boomed over the last 12 months. In Texas, Corporate practices are typically grouped broadly into either mergers and acquisitions or banking and finance. Corporate lawyers today are working extensively with private equity firms which is a relatively new phenomenon. Of course, corporate lawyers still represent corporations, both public and private, along with banks and companies accessing the capital markets. General corporate work, outside of deals, is also a mainstay for many.

In Houston, the deals focus on Energy; in Austin, the focus is on Tech; and in Dallas, while the industry focus is diverse, the work is just as sophisticated.

Opportunity isn't limited to "corporate" work only as the demand for real estate associates is strong as well. Litigation remains steady but demand is forecasted to increase as courts reopen and cases resume on a more normal track. As with litigation, opportunities in labor and

employment remain steady but we expect demand for talent to increase as courts reopen. While demand may dictate opportunity, do your best to choose a practice that is of interest and one that will capture your attention in the long-term.

What's all the hype about Austin?

Austin is the Hottest U.S. Job Market based on unemployment, labor force participation, job growth, labor force growth, and wage growth according to The Wall Street Journal. In addition, Austin has continued its surge as one of the top tech hubs in the United States. Some of the most prominent tech firms have announced their move to the city in recent years, including Tesla, Google, and Amazon.

And why not? Austin is appealing on multiple levels. It is centrally located between both coasts, making for better connectivity for both travel and remote work. Additionally, it is an open-minded, forward-thinking city with a relatively low (though climbing due to popularity) cost of living.

Law firms have noticed the Austin trend. As of December 2021, Austin continued to be one of the top two destinations for large U.S. law firms expanding into new markets. In 2021 alone, large firms Kirkland & Ellis, Quinn Emanuel, Urquhart & Sullivan, and O'Melveny & Myers announced Austin office openings, as did Silicon Valley tech firm Gunderson Dettmer. Eight others have opened offices in the city since 2018. If you are an attorney (especially one with a tech-focused practice) looking for a change, Austin is well worth a look.

Austin Largest Firms (AUSTIN)

Jackson Walker
Baker Botts
Norton Rose Fulbright
Winstead
Husch Blackwell
Locke Lord LLP
Vinson & Elkins
King & Spalding
Thompson Coe
Graves Dougherty
DLA Piper
Kirkland & Ellis
McGinnis Lochridge

Dallas Largest Firms (DAL)

Haynes Boone
Holland & Knight
Winstead
Jackson Walker
Vinson & Elkins
Kelly Hart
Locke Lord LLP
Norton Rose Fulbright
Baker Botts
Hunton Andrews Kurth
McGuireWoods
Gibson Dunn
Jones Day
Kane Russell

Houston Largest Firms (HOU)

Vinson & Elkins
Baker Botts
Norton Rose Fulbright
Bracewell
Hunton Andrews Kurth
Locke Lord LLP
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Jackson Walker
Porter Hedges
Latham & Watkins LLP
King & Spalding
Susman Godfrey
Haynes Boone

The above groupings are the largest firms in a specific market. But if you are looking for a firm recognized for a specific practice, the below may be a good place to start your search:

Banking and Finance

Bracewell (HOU)
Haynes and Boone (DAL)
Simpson Thacher (HOU)
Sidley Austin (DAL) (HOU)
Thompson & Knight (DAL)
Vinson & Elkins (DAL)
Latham & Watkins (HOU)
Baker Botts (DAL)
Willkie Farr (HOU)

Antitrust

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher (DAL)
Norton Rose Fulbright (HOU)
Susman Godfrey (HOU)
Kirkland (DAL)

Intellectual Property

Baker Botts (DAL)
McKool Smith (DAL)
Susman Godfrey (HOU)
Winston & Strawn (HOU)
Fish & Richardson (DAL)

Mergers & Acquisitions

Baker Botts*
Latham & Watkins (HOU)
Gibson Dunn *
Hunton Andrews Kurth *
Jackson Walker *
Akin Gump *
Locke Lord *
Vinson & Elkins *
Kirkland & Ellis *
Jones Day *
*(DAL) (HOU)

Labor & Employment

Littler Mendelson (DAL)
Morgan Lewis (HOU)
Ogletree Deakins (HOU)
Seyfarth Shaw (HOU)
Haynes and Boone (DAL)

Litigation

AZA (HOU)
Beck Redden (DAL)
McKool Smith (DAL)
Susman Godfrey (HOU)
Yetter Coleman (HOU)
Bracewell (HOU)
Gibbs & Bruns (HOU)
King & Spalding (HOU)
Norton Rose Fulbright (DAL)
Smyser Kaplan (HOU)

Real Estate

Locke Lord (HOU)
Hunton Andrews Kurth
Mayer Brown (HOU)
Munsch Hardt Kopf & Harr (DAL)
Winstead (DAL)

Tax

Baker Botts (DAL) (HOU)
Vinson Elkins (DAL) (HOU)
Chamberlain Hrdlicka (HOU)

Healthcare

Husch Blackwell (AUSTIN)
Norton Rose Fulbright (HOU) (AUSTIN)
Morgan Lewis (HOU)
King & Spalding (HOU)
Jackson Walker (DAL)

Immigration

Berry Appleman & Leiden LLP (DAL)
Foster LLP (HOU)
Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP (DAL)

If you are considering a move to Texas, now might be the right time. Because of the exponential growth of Texas cities in the past eight years, firms are open to associates with or without Texas ties. Texas offers one of the lowest costs of living in the country, lower billable hour requirements than other major markets, a relaxed pace of life, and the opportunity to enjoy hands-on experience involving extremely sophisticated work. Firm salaries are matched to the New York legal market, and business development opportunity grows as more and more Fortune 500 companies move their headquarters to Texas!