bodman

Kelly M. Burnell

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Ms. Burnell is a Member of Bodman PLC and Co-Chair of the firm's High Net Worth Practice Group. She is a trusted advisor to high-net-worth individuals and families, family business owners, family offices, fiduciaries, and closely held businesses on sophisticated wealth preservation, tax strategies, business succession, and legacy planning matters. She helps clients preserve, manage, and transition wealth through integrated legal strategies tailored to their financial objectives, family values, and long-term goals.

Ms. Burnell advises clients throughout every stage of the wealth planning lifecycle, including estate planning, trust and estate administration, wealth transfer strategies, charitable planning, asset protection, and ownership transitions. She works closely with clients and their professional advisors to develop practical solutions addressing the legal, tax, financial, and personal considerations associated with significant wealth.

Business owners regularly rely on Ms. Burnell for guidance on entity formation and restructuring, ownership reorganizations, recapitalizations, buy-sell agreements, holding company structures, succession planning and exit strategies. She assists family-owned businesses with structuring ownership interests, centralizing control, enhancing tax efficiency, protecting privacy, and minimizing liability exposure to support successful transitions across generations.

practices & industries

Trust and Estate Litigation

High Net Worth

Tax

education

Michigan State University College of Law, J.D., *summa cum laude*

University of Michigan, Stephen M. Ross School of Business, B.B.A.

admissions

Michigan

Ms. Burnell also advises families on the design, implementation, and administration of family offices and other wealth management structures. She works with families to evaluate appropriate models, establish decision-making processes, coordinate legal, tax, investment, accounting, and risk management advisors, and create systems designed to efficiently manage family wealth. In addition, she counsels families on leadership transitions, next-generation education, family stewardship, and continuity planning.

Ms. Burnell has experience advising clients on significant personal and business transactions, including the purchase and sale of residential properties, investment and commercial real estate, and property management. She regularly assists clients with complex real estate matters as part of broader wealth preservation, tax planning, and succession strategies.

A significant component of Ms. Burnell's practice involves philanthropic planning and charitable giving. She assists clients with the formation and administration of private foundations, donor-advised funds, charitable trusts, and other charitable giving vehicles, helping families incorporate philanthropy into their broader wealth transfer and legacy objectives.

As Co-Chair of Bodman's High Net Worth Practice Group, Ms. Burnell leads a multidisciplinary team that advises affluent individuals and families, family offices, family-owned enterprises, and closely held businesses on complex matters involving wealth preservation, tax planning, business transitions, and the management and transfer of family assets.

Ms. Burnell is consistently recognized as a leading private wealth attorney, including by Chambers High Net Worth for Private Wealth Law. She is a frequent speaker on estate planning, wealth transfer, family offices, succession planning, philanthropic strategies, and wealth preservation.

Prior to joining Bodman, Ms. Burnell was an attorney with a global accounting firm, where she advised corporate clients on tax and financial incentive matters, including negotiating and securing incentives for significant capital investments and job creation in Michigan. She also counseled clients on tax issues associated with mergers and acquisitions and state and local tax planning strategies. This experience provides valuable perspective in advising business owners and families on complex tax, business, and wealth planning matters.

Ms. Burnell grew up in a small town in Northern Michigan, an experience that continues to shape her commitment to building lasting relationships, providing thoughtful counsel, and helping families preserve their legacies for future generations. She currently resides in Plymouth with her husband and three children.

HONORS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITIONS

- Crain's Detroit Notable Women in Law, 2024
- Chambers HNW Private Wealth Law, 2021-2025
- DBusiness Magazine "Top Lawyers" 2020-2027, Trusts and Estates

CIVIC, CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

- CATCH, Member, Board of Trustees

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- State Bar of Michigan
  - Business Law Section
  - Probate & Estate Planning Section
  - Taxation Section
- Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation Network of Professional Advisors
- Financial and Estate Planning Council of Metropolitan Detroit
- Michigan Women's Tax Association
- Washtenaw Estate Planning Council

PUBLICATIONS

- Quoted in "Ready to Retire? Consider Your Options Before Exiting Your Company," Crain's Detroit Business, April 18, 2024 (sub. req.)
- Quoted in "A Tough Split: How Family Businesses Can Protect Themselves in Divorce," Crain's Detroit Business, May 21, 2022 (sub. req.)
- "Other Voices: Tax Credits Can Help Revive Communities," Crain's Detroit Business, October 9, 2011 (sub. req.)

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- "Who Does the Work: Navigating Family Office Decisions," Panelist, Wealth Perspectives 2026 presented by Northern Trust, September 30, 2026
- Business Transition Webinar with Comerica Bank, Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, September 24, 2024
- Business Transition Seminar hosted by Comerica Bank, March 6, 2024, Southfield, Michigan

- "Estate Planning Tax Considerations for 2015," Speaker, Institute for Continuing Legal Education (ICLE), February 19, 2015, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- "2014 Annual Accounting & Regulatory Update: Estate Planning and Property Transfer Update," Presenter, UHY LLP, December 4, 2014, Troy, Michigan
- "Directed Trusts and Divided Trusteeship: Origin Evolution and Implications," Speaker, Midwest Trust and Wealth Management Conference/Michigan Bankers Association, October 7, 2014, Plymouth, Michigan
- "2013 Annual Accounting & Regulatory Update: Estate Tax Planning & Succession Transfers," Co-presenter, UHY LLP, December 4, 2013, Troy, Michigan