

David H. Chao

Partner

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David H. Chao is a former federal prosecutor and accomplished trial lawyer. With more than fifteen years of experience, David represents companies and individuals in government investigations, prosecutions, and high-stakes business disputes. Drawing on his first-chair experience leading trials, appeals, and investigations, David brings that perspective to develop clear-eyed and effective litigation strategy in every case.

David represents healthcare businesses, providers, and executives in a broad range of matters involving allegations of fraud and abuse. His practice includes federal and state criminal investigations alleging healthcare fraud and kickbacks, False Claims Act defense, qui tam litigation, and related regulatory proceedings. David has handled investigations and prosecutions involving pharmacies, surgery centers, hospice, durable medical equipment, family planning services, and compounded drugs. He has also amassed experience defending clients against fraud allegations in a range of other industries, including technology, real estate, and financial services.

Before returning to private practice, David served as a federal prosecutor for more than seven years, most recently as a supervisory Assistant United States Attorney in the Central District of California. As a member of the Major Frauds Section, David investigated and prosecuted some of the most high-profile criminal cases at the U.S. Attorney's Office. He was part of the trial team that tried and convicted the owner of the medical enterprise 1-800-GET-THIN for a \$120 million healthcare fraud scheme. David also prosecuted a Hollywood actor for orchestrating a \$690 million Ponzi scheme, the largest in the history of the Central District of California. His prosecutorial experience spans a range of financial crimes, including healthcare fraud, securities fraud, government program fraud, procurement fraud, wire and bank fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering.

Capabilities

Healthcare
Litigation
Healthcare Government Investigations
Healthcare Litigation
Appellate
Commercial Litigation
Fraud & Abuse
Government & Internal Investigations
Shareholder/Equity Disputes
White Collar Defense

Admissions

California
U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit
U.S. District Court, District of Central California
U.S. District Court, District of Northern California

Academics

J.D., Yale Law School
A.B., *magna cum laude*, Harvard College

Languages

Mandarin

Experience

Buchalter LLP
United States Attorneys' Office for the Central District of California
Bird, Marella, Rhow, Lincenberg, Drooks, & Nessim LLP
Irell & Manella LLP

Professional Memberships

Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association (Vice President)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Pro Bono Advisory Counsel (Former Member)

Professional Accolades

Super Lawyers

Rising Star, *Southern California Super Lawyers Magazine*
(2015-2016)

Best Lawyers

Ones to Watch, Criminal Defense: White-Collar
(2024-2027), *The Best Lawyers in America*

Chambers USA

Member of Leech Tishman's Healthcare Practice Group,
ranked Band 5 for Healthcare in California, Chambers
USA Guide (2026)

Additional Accolades

Pro Bono Advocate of the Year, *Bet Tzedek* (2016)
Pro Bono Award, *Public Counsel Appellate Law Program*
(2015)

Publications

"California AG's Aspen Dental Settlement Is a Warning
Shot on the Urgency of Operationalizing CPOM
Compliance" (2026)

"California Medicaid Deferral Signals More Aggressive
Federal Scrutiny" (2026)

"The Frontier of FCA Enforcement: DOJ Launches New
Initiative to Coordinate with Data Miner Whistleblowers"
(2026)

"Bifurcated Review of Interpreter Determinations Under
the Court Interpreters Act," 10 Conn. Pub. Int. L.J. 171
(2010)

Representative Transactions

David has extensive experience in government investigations and enforcement, complex civil litigation, and federal prosecution.

Government Investigations & Enforcement

- Represented executive of a Chinese public company charged with theft of trade secrets. Obtained dismissal of all federal criminal charges.*
- Represented major pipeline operator and executives charged with environmental violations. Obtained dismissal of all criminal charges, including a judicial finding of factual innocence.*
- Represented pharmacist in \$250 million healthcare fraud criminal prosecution.*
- Represented executive in multi-million enforcement action by Internal Revenue Service.*
- Conducted internal investigations on behalf of various corporate and non-profit clients relating to potential violations of federal and state laws.*
- Represented an immigration attorney charged with fraud by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission relating to his legal work on behalf of EB-5 visa applicants.*

Complex Civil Litigation

- Represented a major PVC-pipe manufacturer in civil RICO actions against plaintiffs' firms alleged to have engaged in fraudulent asbestos litigation.*
- Represented a major consumer electronics company and won summary judgment on breach of contract claims.*
- Represented a major airline in trademark litigation and obtained a favorable settlement after defeating summary judgment.*
- Lead appellate counsel for former public school employee pursuing discrimination claims against largest school district in California. Argued and won appeal, reversing the dismissal of claims and prompting favorable settlement.*

Federal Prosecution Experience

- Obtained jury conviction of the owner of a healthcare enterprise that submitted \$120 million in false claims for Lap-Band surgeries, resulting in a 7-year sentence.*
- Obtained jury conviction of the owner of a durable medical equipment company for a \$24 million fraud scheme against Medicare and Medi-Cal, resulting in a 15-year sentence.*
- Obtained mid-trial guilty plea from the owner of a family planning clinic for submitting \$5 million in fraudulent claims to Medi-Cal, resulting in a 10-year sentence.*
- Obtained conviction of pharmacy owner, marketers, and physician for conduct relating to scheme involving kickbacks and billings to Tricare for compounded medications.*
- Obtained conviction of mastermind of \$650 million investor fraud involving sham Hollywood investments, the largest Ponzi scheme in the history of the Central District of California.*

*Denotes an attorney's experience prior to joining Leech Tishman