

DAILY REPORT

Defense, National Security Industries Draw Holland & Knight to Alabama's 'Rocket City'

By Thomas Spigolon

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What You Need to Know

- Intellectual property partner Ryan Letson and associate Andrew Tuggle are the office's two founding members.
- Letson joined Holland & Knight at the start of the year from Bradley, where he chaired the IP practice.
- The city's status as a hub for defense, aerospace, technology and manufacturing companies is a main driver for the launch.

Holland & Knight has expanded to defense and aerospace hub Huntsville, Alabama, in a move firm leaders say strengthens its "commitment to the defense industry" with resources that include a new national security-focused practice group.

The Am Law 50 firm announced Thursday it opened an office in Alabama's largest city with two founding members, intellectual property partner Ryan Letson, who joined the firm at the start of the year, and associate Andrew Tuggle.

Holland & Knight chair and CEO Bob Grammig said the city's status as a hub for defense, aerospace, technology and manufacturing companies was a main driver for opening in Huntsville.

"We regard ourselves as being the premier firm in national defense and security right now," Grammig said in an interview. "From our perspective, in the world of defense and technology and related areas [and] national security, Huntsville is ground zero for everything."



Credit: SeanPavonePhoto/Adobe Stock

Huntsville, Alabama.

Washington, D.C.-based partner Jason Klitenic, a former general counsel for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, leads the firm's national security and defense industry group. He said Huntsville "has become a key destination for our clients and an area of growing significance in the national security space" because of its status "as a hub for sophisticated defense, aerospace and technology companies."

The 200-lawyer national security group was created in 2025 and "Huntsville's just a natural place" for its expertise because of its status as a defense and aerospace hub, Grammig said.

"When you look at where things are developing and where the entrepreneurs are going to be," he said.

"Having the boots on the ground and access to the support of the entire network that we have I think is going to be a differentiator for us in Huntsville."

Employers that are key to the regional economy around Huntsville include the federal government's Redstone Arsenal complex and NASA Marshall Space Flight Center; defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Northrop Grumman; and Mazda and Toyota at a jointly operated vehicle manufacturing facility near the city.

Grammig said the firm will use its "long-standing focus on sectors that are core to Huntsville's economy" and its "extensive resources and capabilities of our global platform" to "significantly" increase its capabilities in Huntsville, Grammig said.

Also, having a physical office in Huntsville "will give easier access to our clients there and other potential clients [with a] very significant national platform," Grammig said.

"It's a giant platform but the level of sophistication in Huntsville and the legal needs in Huntsville—they require that kind of expertise," Grammig said.

Other Am Law 200 firms with Huntsville offices include Dentons, Womble Bond Dickinson, Bradley Arant Boult Cummings, Baker Donelson and Maynard Nexsen, according to Law.com Compass.

Grammig said Letson has a "depth of national security and defense experience" and "strong ties to the Huntsville business and legal communities" that make him "the ideal leader for our new office."

Grammig noted that defense- and technology-related construction is prevalent throughout Huntsville, while the FBI and U.S. Space Command each have begun moving their national headquarters to Redstone Arsenal.

"Huntsville right now is really one of the tech centers of the country," Grammig said. "It is the No. 1 place to be in a lot of ways."

Letson joined Holland & Knight earlier this year from Am Law 100 firm Bradley, where he served as chair of the IP practice group. His practice focuses on "the full spectrum" of IP law for clients in the defense, aerospace, technology and manufacturing industries and higher education. Earlier in his career

he practiced at Maynard Nexsen legacy firm Maynard Cooper & Gale. He began his professional career as a systems engineer at Boeing where he worked on border security systems within the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Borders Initiative program, a firm spokesperson said.

Letson said in an interview that national security and defense industries have been "foundational" to the city's economy for more than 70 years and have grown in prominence in recent decades. Redstone Arsenal opened in 1949 as home to the Army's rocket and missile program, and Marshall Space Flight Center opened in 1960.

"It's attracted some of the best and brightest talent in terms of knowledge working for companies, and companies themselves to open up here," he said.

Letson said he appreciated Holland & Knight's "commitment to Alabama and look forward to contributing to the firm's success across the state and filling our Huntsville office with the most talented and entrepreneurial lawyers in the city." He said he wanted to recruit attorneys that "meet client needs" in such areas as national security and defense, as well as international trade, labor & employment, real estate and others.

Grammig said Holland & Knight also is "bullish on Alabama generally" and it "continues to be an important growth market for the firm." Huntsville represents the firm's 36th office worldwide and its second office in Alabama after it entered the Birmingham market in 2023 through a merger with Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis.

Huntsville represents the firm's latest move to expand nationally and internationally beyond its original Florida base—which began in earnest in the 1990s when it opened in Atlanta, San Francisco, New York, Boston and other parts of the Northeast.

Before Huntsville, the firm's latest expansions included Seattle in 2025, where it opened with 16 attorneys joining from a regional firm in M&A, IP, real estate, healthcare, labor and employment, and litigation.

It also added new offices in Birmingham and Nashville and Chattanooga in Tennessee through the Waller Lansden merger in 2023.