

Howard M. Talenfeld

Partner

 Fort Lauderdale

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Biography

Howard M. Talenfeld is a Partner and Business Unit Leader in **Justice for Kids** Division, the firm's national practice dedicated to providing legal services to abused, disabled, and catastrophically injured children harmed at home, in child welfare and foster care settings, group home settings and residential treatment centers, as well as all children harmed by the acts of others.

One of the nation's preeminent children's rights attorneys, Howard has spent three decades representing and protecting thousands of children in cases of foster care abuse, child sexual abuse, child rape, and other harm, in child welfare settings. Since the 1980s, when Howard began representing at-risk minors, he has amassed successes in trial courts, appellate courts, and direct settlement negotiations. His creative legal approaches have achieved extraordinary results in both earning significant damage awards – often in excess of Florida's sovereign immunity limits – as well as bringing to justice those responsible for catastrophic harm to children.

His work not only has achieved multi-million dollar damage awards, but his cases have resulted in landmark decisional law protecting the rights of children and disabled persons. He and the legal teams he has led, have ushered in systemic change in how government agencies and private institutions care for society's most vulnerable citizens.

Howard began his career representing the state of Florida in lawsuits involving the foster care system, children's mental health system, juvenile justice system, state psychiatric hospitals, and Medicaid services. He pioneered defenses that advocate for the improvement and reform of human service systems, while protecting states' rights and avoiding federal over-sight. He also represented Florida's governors, secretaries of state agencies, the Insurance Commissioner, the Legislature, and Florida's Auditor General in civil rights cases in federal and state court.

Beyond the courtroom, Howard has argued for systemic reform before many state and national groups, including the U.S. Congress, Florida legislative committees, the National Association of State Mental Health Lawyers, and the American Public Welfare Association. He helped to establish tens of millions of dollars in annual funding for child welfare programs; helped write laws impacting child victims of sexual abuse and rape; and he successfully advocated for passage of a State House bill requiring minor victims of sexual abuse or trafficking, those prescribed psychotropic medications or those who have been committed to a residential treatment facilities, to be able to have attorneys represent them in all legal or administrative proceedings.

In 2024, Howard was recognized on Forbes' inaugural list of America's Top 200 Lawyers as one of only six lawyers on the list nationally selected for Civil Rights Law.

In 2018, Howard was recognized by The Florida Bar Foundation as the recipient of the Medal of Honor Award for a Lawyer. The Medal of Honor Award is the highest award given by The Florida Bar Foundation and recognizes individuals who have distinguished themselves through their exceptional achievements in improving the administration of justice in Florida.

Howard has also chaired the Florida Bar Legal Needs of Children Committee three times in 2009-10, 2020-2021, and 2021-22 –more times than any other advocate. In this role, he has inspired legislation providing for the representation of foster children in their own dependency cases including disabled children, medically fragile children, severely emotional disturbed children and victims of human trafficking. He also created the sub-committee examining the over-representation of black children in foster care.

Howard earned both his Bachelor of Arts degree and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Miami.

Admissions

- Florida
- Florida State and Appellate Courts
- United States Supreme Court
- United States District Court for the Southern, Middle and Northern Districts of Florida

Education

- University of Miami School of Law, J.D., *cum laude*, 1979
- University of Miami, B.A., 1974

Awards

- Forbes, "America's Top 200 Lawyers," 2024
- *Super Lawyers Magazine*, Florida "Super Lawyers," Personal Injury General, 2006 – 2026
- Keiser University Choice Awards, "Minority Community Leaders," 2023
- Florida Trend, "Florida 500 Living Legends," 2022 – 2023
- Best Lawyers®, "The Best Lawyers in America"
 - Civil Rights Law, 2017 – 2026
 - Personal Injury Litigation – Plaintiffs, 2019 – 2026
- Martindale-Hubbell™, AV Preeminent® Top Rated Lawyer, 1986 – Present
- South Florida Legal Guide, "Top Lawyers," 2007 – 2022
- Fort Lauderdale Illustrated, "Top Lawyer," Personal Injury Litigation, 2022
- South Florida Business & Wealth, Legal Awards, Honoree, 2021
- Florida Trend, "Florida 500 Most Influential Business Leaders," 2018 – 2021
- 211 Broward, Non-Profit Organization Board Leader of the Year Awards, Finalist, 2020
- The Florida Bar Foundation, Medal of Honor Award for a Lawyer, 2018
- The University of Miami Law Alumni Association, Alumni Achievement Award, 2016
- The Heart Gallery of Broward County, Child Advocate of the Year, 2016
- Daily Business Review, Professional Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award, 2016
- Lifestyle Media Group, Leaders in Law Winner for Personal Injury, 2014
- Daily Business Review, Most Effective Lawyer recognition, Public Interest, 2013
- South Florida Business Journal, "Key Partners Awards" honoree, 2012
- Daily Business Review, Most Effective Lawyer recognition, Pro Bono, 2011
- Florida Super Lawyer magazine Article, "Fostering Hope," 2010
- Florida Bar Association, "President's Award of Merit," 2010
- Broward Days, "Community Advocate Award," 2010
- Lawyers for Children America, "Policy Advocate Award," 2010
- South Florida Business Journal, "Let's Do Something Giant" Award Recipient, Legal Category, 2008

- President's Pro Bono Service Award for the 17th Judicial Circuit, 2006
- March of Dimes Award, 2007
- Daily Business Review, Most Effective Lawyer recognition, 2006
- Legal Aid Service of Broward County, Russell Carlisle Award, 2004
- Kathleen Wright Award for a professional who has improved the quality of life for children in Florida, Family Central, 2002
- "Making a Difference" Award, Justice for Children and Families, 2002
- Blue Ribbon Hero Award for Guardian ad Litem Pro Bono Attorney (2001-2002)
- Broward Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, Outstanding Citizen of the Year, April 2000