# Freshfields faces backlash over support for Perkins Coie amid US political tensions



Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer has stirred considerable controversy with its surprising decision to support Perkins Coie, a U.S. law firm that has fallen under the scrutiny of an executive order from former President Donald Trump, which seeks to bar it from government work due to its representation of high-profile adversaries like Hillary Clinton and George Soros. In an era where integrity is paramount, this move makes Freshfields an outlier among the world’s elite law firms, suggesting both a cultural shift and a miscalibration of priorities as it integrates deeper into the American legal landscape.

The firm’s endorsement of Perkins Coie, articulated through a supportive amicus brief, is indicative of a troubling embrace of political affiliations that diverges from its historical roots in conservative values. For an institution with a rich heritage in the UK, such a pivot raises significant questions about the motivations behind its strategic shift, especially as it actively engages in the complexities of U.S. politics.

Freshfields has aggressively expanded in the U.S. through strategic acquisitions and hiring, notably adding more than 50 partners from prominent U.S. firms to its roster since 2019. While this growth aligns with a narrative of necessary evolution, it has ostensibly eroded the firm's traditional values and cohesion. The injection of U.S.-based partners, now making up nearly a fifth of its leadership, not only burdens the financial structure—where partners outside the U.S. face increased demands to subsidise lavish American initiatives—but also presents a drastic cultural upheaval within the firm’s operations.

Despite claims of revenue growth—an impressive 42% in this period—profit margins tell a more sobering story, escalating by only 32%. With many U.S. competitors achieving average profits per equity partner upwards of $9 million, Freshfields’ financial positioning raises alarms about its long-term viability and strategic direction as it grapples with an increasingly competitive and politicised marketplace.

The decision to advocate for Perkins Coie, largely guided by senior partner Georgia Dawson, reflects a precarious balance between financial strategy and ethical positioning. In a climate where firms are facing intense scrutiny over their political stances, the implications of such support reach far beyond internal measures. The legal profession is rife with tension, with many firms opting for a defensive posture in light of governmental pressures and diversity-related inquiries from the EEOC perceived as intimidation.

As the legal community grapples with the ramifications of Trump’s executive order, which a federal judge has recently blocked on constitutional grounds, Freshfields must navigate the fallout. This judicial decision not only represents a significant legal victory against government overreach but also forces all firms to scrutinise their engagement with politics. Are we witnessing a transformation that might lead to increased ethical lapses within the legal field, or a renewed commitment to principle and integrity?

Striking a resolute stance in support of Perkins Coie could bolster Freshfields' image among clients who appreciate firms unafraid to defy political coercion. Yet, this path carries the potential for severe backlash from a political climate that appears less tolerant of dissent. Freshfields is now at a critical crossroads, where the repercussions from both the EEOC inquiries and broader political developments will test its resolve and reshape its future in a tumultuous market.

As the firm continues to chart its course, the tension between maintaining financial viability while upholding ethical stances remains paramount, reshaping not only its internal narrative but also contributing to the ongoing discourse about the intersection of law and politics across the U.S. legal field.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/1d56ce76-14b4-422f-a75b-f8b041624cba> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/1d56ce76-14b4-422f-a75b-f8b041624cba> - This article discusses Freshfields' bold decision to support Perkins Coie, a U.S. law firm targeted by President Donald Trump's executive order banning it from government business due to its representation of Trump's adversaries. Freshfields' support underscores its commitment to principle and independence, marking a cultural shift as it aggressively expands into the U.S. market. The expansion has enhanced its presence and client base but also strained finances, with global staff costs rising and non-U.S. partners subsidizing American growth. The firm's action, led by senior partner Georgia Dawson, has received mixed reactions but has enhanced its reputation among clients and potential hires. However, it now risks being targeted by the Trump administration, especially after receiving a diversity-related inquiry from the EEOC. The firm faces a critical test as it decides whether to maintain its stance or align with U.S. rivals that struck deals with Trump.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/86a9dc14-49d8-47df-a0ea-cb90c26544e7> - This article highlights Freshfields' significant moves in the U.S. market, including the 2019 recruitment of star lawyer Ethan Klingsberg and subsequent increase in American partners and high-profile clients like Google. However, this expansion has strained finances and sparked internal cultural debates, particularly after Freshfields alone among the top-20 global firms supported Perkins Coie in opposing a contentious executive order from Donald Trump. Senior partner Georgia Dawson backed the decision, signaling a shift in the firm’s political commitments.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/law-firms-back-perkins-coie-lawsuit-against-punitive-trump-order-2025-04-04/> - Over 500 law firms have united in support of Perkins Coie’s lawsuit against a punitive executive order issued by former President Donald Trump. The order targeted Perkins Coie for its diversity policies and past legal work for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign. These firms, primarily litigation-focused or smaller in size, signed an amicus brief expressing concern over Trump’s attempts to intimidate the legal profession. The brief, presented to U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell, highlighted fears of retaliation against law firms representing clients opposing the Trump administration. Judge Howell has already blocked portions of Trump’s order, deeming them unconstitutional and undermining the legal system. Other targeted firms include WilmerHale and Jenner & Block, which also filed lawsuits and received favorable court rulings. Some firms, such as Paul Weiss, Milbank, and Skadden Arps, reached settlements with the Trump administration. Key law firms like Latham & Watkins and Gibson Dunn abstained from signing the brief. The executive orders also accused targeted firms of reverse discrimination in diversity policies. The legal community, including former U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli and thousands of lawyers, has widely condemned Trump’s actions as abusive and dangerous to the rule of law.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/d5375d80-45c0-403d-8e42-dfdd4c7e8bcd> - A U.S. federal judge in Washington, D.C., has permanently blocked an executive order by President Donald Trump that targeted law firm Perkins Coie, deeming it unconstitutional and a violation of free speech and due process. Judge Beryl Howell declared the order 'null and void,' emphasizing that it undermined lawyers' ability to represent clients without fear of government reprisal. The order had suspended security clearance for Perkins Coie employees and initiated reviews of government contracts due to the firm's past work with Hillary Clinton during the 2016 election. The decision sent a strong signal to the legal community as multiple law firms had made undisclosed deals with the Trump administration, raising ethical concerns and prompting some clients to sever business relationships. Firms such as Paul Weiss, Skadden, and Kirkland & Ellis have been scrutinized for their cooperation, with some Democratic lawmakers warning of potential legal violations. Meanwhile, other firms like WilmerHale and Jenner & Block are challenging similar executive actions. The ruling also revealed that larger firms have been selectively avoiding politically entangled firms and highlighted broader implications for legal ethics and client trust within the industry.
6. <https://law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/rule-law-clinic-represents-27-former-senior-government-officials-amicus-brief> - The Yale Law School Rule of Law Clinic filed an amicus brief supporting Perkins Coie in challenging the constitutionality of President Trump’s March 6 executive order, which sanctioned law firms and lawyers for their representation of the president’s former political opponents. The brief argues that the executive orders were ultra vires, based on no valid national security concern, issued without any colorable legal authority, and unconstitutionally interfere with the separation of powers. The amici, 27 former senior government officials, express concern over the unprecedented punitive and retaliatory nature of the order, which attacks and intimidates lawyers and a law firm on the basis of their lawful activities.
7. <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/legal-organizations-across-ideologies-file-amicus-brief-urging-court-to-enjoin-executive-order-targeting-perkins-coie> - On March 6, the Trump administration issued an executive order placing sanctions on law firm Perkins Coie for their past work on voting rights lawsuits and their representation of President Trump’s prior political opponents. In response, 11 legal advocacy organizations filed an amicus brief asking the court to strike down the executive order. The brief argues that the executive order unconstitutionally retaliates against Perkins Coie for its constitutionally protected advocacy and violates separation of powers and due process. The organizations include the ACLU, ACLU of D.C., Cato Institute, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, Institute for Justice, Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, National Coalition Against Censorship, Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press, The Rutherford Institute, and Society for the Rule of Law Institute.