

## Legal Industry Highlights: Law Firm Hires, Awards, and COVID-19 Innovation in May 2020

Article By:

The National Law Review

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While the world has been hunkered down at home, participating in Zoom calls and getting jobs done from kitchen tables and home offices across the country, the legal industry has continued to innovate, respond and move forward, even during these troubled times.

Read on for a sampling of legal industry changes from May 2020.

### Hiring and Law Firm Moves

Last week, [Perkins Coie](#) announced that [Jill Louis joined the Corporate & Securities practice](#) as a partner in the Dallas office, in a move that further augments their capabilities in the Lone Star state. [Randy Bridgeman](#), the co-chair of Perkins Coie's Corporate & Securities practice praised Louis's entrepreneurial spirit and her in house and leadership experience. He says, "Jill's background in M&A and representing private equity-backed healthcare, infrastructure, and technology companies will be highly valuable to our clients across Texas and beyond."



Jill B. Louis Perkins Coie

Louis has experience working with public and private companies in mergers and acquisitions,

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franchise transactions, corporate governance matters and working in industries including retail, technology and healthcare. She has worked with large and small companies, from startups to Fortune 50 corporations, and has worked both in house and in private practice during her career. Dean Harvey, the Dallas office managing partner, says, "Jill's arrival aligns with our ongoing strategy of expanding our corporate offering in Dallas to support our growing technology and privacy capabilities."

Up in the northeast, [Pierce Atwood](#) added bankruptcy and creditors' rights attorney [Alex F. Mattera](#) to the firm's Boston office. Mattera focuses his practice on creditor and debtor rights, commercial bankruptcy, bankruptcy litigation and insolvency. He represents secured creditors, focusing on the collection and workouts of defaulted and troubled loans, creditors' committees, debtors, trustees and other parties involved in bankruptcy.

"Alex's expertise in bankruptcy and creditors' rights matters, particularly his loan workout experience, will really help us serve our lending and business clients. This is the third major recession Alex has been through," said Pierce Atwood Business Practice Group Chair [Keith J. Cunningham](#). "That kind of experience is so valuable in times like these. We couldn't be happier to welcome him to the firm."

Mattera has presented and sat on panels for the [American Bankruptcy Institute](#), as well as Massachusetts Continuing Education and the Boston Bar Association.

"Alex's expertise in workouts and collections will provide the firm even greater depth on the backend of loan transactions as we continue to provide a comprehensive suite of services to creditors and banks," said [Bruce I. Miller](#), Pierce Atwood's real estate lending partner.



Devon Williams of Ward and Smith

With an eye to the future and succession planning, North Carolina firm [Ward and Smith](#) elected labor and employment attorney [Devon Williams](#) as the firm's co-managing director elect. Williams will assume the new role at the end of 2020. She will serve alongside [Brad Evans](#), who has served as the Ward and Smith's managing director since 2017. Williams is preceded in the co-managing director position by [Ken Wooten](#), who is retiring from Ward and Smith at the end of this year.

"Succession planning is essential to all businesses, including our own, and choosing a strong leader enables seamless continuity in client service, and maintains stability within the firm," Wooten said. "I think it says a lot about our firm that we're selecting a millennial leader to take us into the next decade. Devon will bring a unique, and much needed perspective to the perennial concerns of a fully-

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engaged law firm.”

Since joining Ward and Smith in 2012, Williams has led the firm’s Labor and Employment Section and co-chaired the Raleigh Geographic Team.

"I'm grateful for and enthusiastic about the opportunity to build upon the legacy the firm has experienced under Ken's leadership while working in tandem with Brad to continue our efforts to innovate efficient legal solutions for our clients, and attract and retain top-tier talent," Williams said.

As co-managing director of Ward and Smith, Williams will maintain her labor and employment practice, where she advises employers on wage and hour issues, federal contractor compliance, prevention of employment discrimination, employee discipline and retaliation and harassment claims.

Life sciences attorney Frank Rahmani joined [Sidley Austin](#) as a partner in the firm’s [Palo Alto, Calif.,](#) corporate practice, and will be a member of the Global Life Sciences practice. Rahmani counsels CEOs, boards of directors, founders and investors on financings and public offerings, strategic collaborations, licensing matters, technology acquisition and spin-off transactions.

“Frank has a well-earned reputation as a trusted adviser, which is built on enduring relationships and breadth of experience representing high-growth, cutting edge life sciences and technology companies and investors at all stages,” said [Martin Wellington](#), managing partner of Sidley Austin’s Palo Alto office. “He has great energy, a high-quality practice and a clear vision for growth that aligns with ours. Frank’s arrival signifies our strategy to build out Sidley’s presence in Northern California.”

[Womble Bond Dickinson](#) retired partner and North Carolina trial lawyer Allan R. Gitter [passed away](#) May 17 at the age of 83.



Alan Gitter

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Gitter joined Womble Bond Dickinson in 1962, when Womble had about a dozen attorneys. Gitter was the lead attorney in over one thousand cases filed in North Carolina state and federal courts between 1964 and 2009. Many lawyers who are now partners with the firm tried their first cases with Gitter, including [Gemma Saluta](#), Murray Greason, [Rachel Keen](#), Jim Morgan, Rick Rice, Bill Raper, Ellen Gregg, Alison Bost, Brad Wood and Chris Geis.

Gitter was inducted as a fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers in 1982, and served as an Advocate in the American Board of Trial Advocates. He loved legal research and the law, but his interests also included coaching the Tiny Demons Pop Warner football team and his work at the [Children's Center](#), a facility devoted to the education and care of children with chronic health issues. He put himself through law school in part with his work as a night radio deejay on the campus radio station, employing his trademark sign-off at the end of the night: "Remember never to buy bad dreams."

Gitter is survived by his wife of 32 years, Sandy; three children, Alison, Kent, and Ryne; two step-children, Wendy and Rob; multiple grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

## Law Firm Innovation, Awards and Accomplishments

[Redgrave LLP](#), a law firm focused on information governance and eDiscovery law, [formed](#) a [Restructuring Discovery Team](#), working closely with law firms and advisors on litigation readiness and discovery for all types of restructurings. The Redgrave team handles data collection, preservation and review efforts during pre-petition and after a bankruptcy has been filed.

"We are proud to be the nation's leading eDiscovery law firm, and we are very excited to formalize our experience in restructuring discovery," said Redgrave partner [Christine Payne](#), head of the firm's restructuring team. "Many people do not realize how different discovery can be in the restructuring and bankruptcy contexts, as opposed to typical civil litigation. There is significant client need in this area, and we want to support that."

[Managing Intellectual Property](#) [named](#) three Texas [Bracewell](#) partners as IP Stars. [Albert B. Kimball](#), was recognized for patents and trademarks, and [Constance Gall Rhebergen](#) and [Douglas W. Rommelmann](#) were recognized for patents.

IP Stars covers IP practice areas in over 70 jurisdictions, making it one of the most comprehensive guides in the industry.

In a decision that could provide a roadmap for local Marijuana dispensaries, A Kutak Rock team including litigation partners [Andrew King](#) and [Fred Davis](#), and intellectual property counsel [Sara Gillette](#) representing Conway, Arkansas-based Harvest Cannabis Dispensary ("Harvest") secured a preliminary injunction in a trademark dispute. Natural State Wellness Dispensary, LLC ("NSW"), and Natural State Enterprises, LLC, were using the name "Harvest" in for cannabis facilities across Arkansas, something the preliminary injunction now prohibits.

After an evidentiary hearing conducted over Zoom, Circuit judge Susan Weaver rejected the argument that The NSW Entities were authorized to use the name "Harvest" through their connection with Arizona-based Harvest Health & Recreation, Inc, a company using the Harvest mark in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Florida prior to the opening of the Arkansas Harvest dispensary. The court looked at precedent set by the USPTO and other federal courts, indicating products containing more than 0.3% THC are illegal under the Controlled Substances Act and therefore do not enjoy

Trademark rights under the Lanham Act. Furthermore, Harvest adopted its name in 2017 and opened its facility in October of 2019, providing the dispensary with state-law trademark rights in Arkansas.

Kutak Rock partner Andrew King: “The Faulkner County outcome is the first of its kind, where a local cannabis dispensary prevailed under state trademark law against a multi-state operator for which federal trademark protection is unavailable. This outcome could provide a road map for local cannabis companies in states where cannabis has been legalized.”

## Law Firm and Legal industry Response to COVID-19: A Sampling

COVID-19 has upended business as usual across the country; injecting terms like “flatten the curve”; “PPE” and “Contact Tracing” into everyday conversation. The National Law Review has covered some of the steps firms and other legal industry groups have taken to have a positive impact during these challenging times. For example, [DLA Piper has signed on to the Ascend’s Five Point Action program](#), demonstrating a dedication to mitigating the disparate impact of COVID-19 on minority communities. Additionally, to broaden the reach of Coronavirus information and regulatory developments, Cornerstone Research worked with Stanford University to provide a [database of legal articles and memos](#). Below are some more instances of law firms and other legal industry groups taking steps to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19.



[Mintz Law Firm](#) provided pro bono counsel to Partners in Health (“PIH”), a Boston global health nonprofit, helping with the development of the Massachusetts COVID-19 Community Tracing Collaborative (“CTC”). The CTC is an initiative that works with PIH, the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center, Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority and Massachusetts Department of Public Health to train, hire and deploy workers who will work with individuals exposed to Coronavirus. This veritable army of “contact tracers” will provide individuals with information about the virus, social support to facilitate self-isolation or quarantine, and provide appropriate next steps so individuals can stay healthy and protect their families; ultimately enhancing the Commonwealth’s ability to respond to COVID-19. Dr. Joia Mukherjee, PIH’s chief medical officer, says on contact tracing:

Access to this information helps contacts to know how to protect their loved ones, and to get tested or cared for themselves,” she said. “Without knowing our own status, without being able to specifically protect our loved ones, we are all living in the dark. (And) we know that there is significant anxiety in this darkness.

An interdisciplinary group of Mintz attorneys worked with PIH to facilitate this partnership on a pro-bono basis, helping this critical work get off the ground. Attorneys involved were [Dianne Bourque](#) and Ellen Janos, Members in Mintz’s Health Practice, [Elissa Flynn-Poppey](#), Chair of the Government Law Practice, [Julie Korostoff](#) Chair of the firm’s IT Transactions & Outsourcing Practice, [Andrew Matzkin, a Member in the firm’s Employment practice](#), and Corporate Associate [Daniel Marden](#).

“Mintz is pleased to have been able to assist PIH in its efforts to change the course of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth,” said [Mintz Member Ellen Janos](#). “It has been deeply rewarding to work on such



a critically important project.”

Another group working to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 is the [Diverse Attorney Pipeline Program](#) (“DAPP”), a group with a mission to diversify the legal profession by expanding opportunities for women of color law students to secure summer positions at law firms and corporations following their first year of law school, an activity that greatly increases the likelihood of an offer of paid employment after graduation. DAPP was founded by Tiffany Harper and Chastity Boyce, both women of color who graduated from law school during the previous recession, and are passionate about mitigating the negative effects on women attorneys of color.

Recognizing the disruption that COVID-19 has had on everyone, and specifically law firm internships, DAPP is launching a fund and fellowship for students who are unable to complete their law firm internships this year. The Displaced Student Stipend Fund and Fellowship was started with seed money from the organization, and DAPP has a goal of 100,000 to fund this program, and is requesting support from law firms, corporations, bar associations, and other nonprofit organizations in the form of earmarked donations.

“As law firms and businesses are forced to cut their summer internship programs, we hope they’ll consider contributing to this fund to support our work of infusing the pipeline to the legal profession with talented, highly qualified women of color in order to address the dismal statistics surrounding the number of women of color who are hired, retained and promoted at large law firms across the nation,” said Harper.

Students who receive the stipend will receive financial support as well as intensive professional development; involving volunteer legal work to facilitate skill development and meaningful training for participants. Additionally, the awardees will be matched with lawyer mentors, be provided with professional development and coaching.

“This is not a time to give up on diversity and inclusion efforts; it’s a time to refocus our efforts on preparing the next generation of lawyers for the challenges they’ll face in a diverse, global marketplace,” added Boyce.

*Rachel Popa contributed to this article.*

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National Law Review, Volume X, Number 153

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/legal-industry-highlights-law-firm-hires-awards-and-covid-19-innovation-may-2020>