

Cooley Adds 3 Chicago Partners, Including Kirkland, Mayer Brown Vets

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By Andrew Maloney

What You Need to Know

- Weeks after opening an office in Chicago, Cooley is adding three more partners to build up its litigation group in the city.
- The laterals come from Kirkland & Ellis, Mayer Brown and the U.S. attorney’s office.
- Several Am Law 200 firms have recently opened in Chicago to capitalize on rates, reach and innovation.

A little more than a month after it opened an office in Chicago, Cooley is boosting its Windy City presence, bringing aboard laterals from Kirkland & Ellis, Mayer Brown and the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

Three partner additions announced this week focus on transactional disputes, cybersecurity and white-collar defense. Bobby Earles joins Cooley from Kirkland;

Lei Shen from Mayer Brown; and Matt Kutcher from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Illinois. They are building blocks for Cooley’s litigation practice in the city, which aims to be a go-to firm for emerging and technology-focused clients.

The firm has added eight associates and one of counsel in the weeks since it opened, and will grow “significantly” over the remainder of the year, said Travis LeBlanc, a leader in Cooley’s litigation and data privacy groups.

“We’re definitely in growth mode in Chicago, and we’re looking for the best talent in the region,” LeBlanc said, stating that the new partner hires “represent the cream of the crop in Chicago, and provide



Courtesy photos

(L-R): Lei Shen, Bobby Earles and Matt Kutcher have joined Cooley’s office in Chicago as partners in litigation and data privacy, the firm announced this week.

key legal needs to the companies driving the economy, whether in technology or life sciences.”

Kutcher served as an assistant U.S. attorney and deputy chief of the general crimes section, starting in 2015. He previously chaired the litigation group for Latham & Watkins in Chicago. He focuses on white-collar defense and securities and general commercial litigation.

Earles focuses on private equity, venture capital and mergers and acquisitions disputes. Shen focuses on transactional advocacy and

privacy compliance as an expert in cybersecurity issues.

All three cited Cooley's client base, with its focus on companies in the startup and emerging phases, as one of the top reasons they were attracted to the firm.

Kutcher noted his previous stops at Latham and Cravath, Swaine & Moore, noting those firms generally represented more developed clients.

"Cooley's client base is really distinct and unique, and I think that will change my practice a bit, in terms of helping them see through challenges along that entire life cycle, versus the mature end of the life cycle," he said. "So, I think that's probably the biggest difference, is just the nature of the clients."

The announcement comes as Am Law 200 firms continue to pour into Chicago. Crowell & Moring entered the market last week, merging with intellectual property

boutique Brinks, Gilson & Lione. King & Spalding, White & Case and Willkie, Farr & Gallagher have also recently dropped anchor next to Lake Michigan.

The legal industry's attraction to Chicago over the last several years is a result of high-performing firms looking to enhance their finances as they scale, and finding a market where they can both increase their reach and command high-end rates, said Kent Zimmermann, a Chicago-based consultant for Zeughauser Group. He noted that Cooley and other firms have also tried to capitalize on the increasing influence of technology across sectors.

"That's a common thread that we've seen that runs through other firms that have come to Chicago recently, like Cooley and others," Zimmermann said.

He added that in sectors such as insurance, manufacturing and financial services, technology now plays a central role.

"Sometimes to acquire technology, it requires IP work to protect rights. It often requires disputes counsel when there are disputes over business agreements. It requires white collar, when there are internal government investigations." Zimmermann said. "If you look at why Cooley came here, it was because of that."

LeBlanc, the litigation and data privacy leader, noted the firm has worked with clients in Chicago for years, and spent months before the office launched canvassing the market for talented lawyers to add. He said the firm doesn't have a set number of attorneys it wants to add, but that it's trying to build a "cohesive culture" in Chicago.

"This is meant to be a serious commitment to the region and a recognition of just how important America's third-largest city is to the economy, particularly in the areas of technology and life sciences," LeBlanc said.