

# The Legal Intelligencer

## Firms Are Aggressively Seeking Labor and Employment Laterals

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by Lizzy McLellan | August 07, 2017

### Case Digest Summary

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Most recently, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney announced that it [added eight lawyers](#) from the labor and employment practice at Obermayer Rebmann Maxwell & Hippel. Before that, [Cozen O'Connor took a dozen labor and employment lawyers](#) from Buchanan Ingersoll's Philadelphia office, as well as a few from other offices.

The next likely move could be by Obermayer Rebmann—managing partner Mathieu Shapiro said he’s already looking to fill the void left by the Buchanan Ingersoll defectors. It’s always a practice area of interest to law firms, he said, and regional firms feel “pressure that comes from the national labor and employment boutiques.”

Sandra Mannix, of Abelson Legal Search, made a similar observation about national boutiques like Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart, Fisher Phillips and Littler Mendelson. The growth of those firms has “changed the complexion” of the labor and employment space, she said, but full-service firms with established employment practices feel a need to stay competitive.

Brian Casal, one of the lawyers who joined Cozen O’Connor in May, said the competition against boutiques was a driver in his group’s move. Tom Giotto, who joined the firm’s new Pittsburgh office in May, said that Cozen O’Connor’s focus on building out a national labor and employment practice meshed well with his goals. CEO Michael Heller said that some middle-market law firms have stopped focusing on labor and employment work, leaving a void for firms like his to exploit.

Buchanan Ingersoll, meanwhile, is looking to broaden its labor and employment practice, CEO Joseph Dougherty said, with a greater focus on “solutions-oriented” work, like employment counseling and defense. The Obermayer Rebmann group included national, midmarket and small clients, he said.



## More to Come

*Brian Levinson, managing partner at Alevistar Group,* agreed that firm leaders are consistently interested in growing their labor and employment ranks. But in the past

year or two, its been especially “hot,” he said.

The moves haven’t been limited to Pennsylvania. South Carolina-based Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, for instance, [just nabbed a new co-head](#) of its labor and employment practice from Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo. And [Jones Day recently hired two labor and employment partners](#) in its Los Angeles and Minneapolis offices, pulling from Winston & Strawn and Dorsey & Whitney.

“I don’t know of any other area where for so long a period of time, there have been as many notable moves as there have been in labor and employment,” Mannix said.

Joseph Centeno, part of the group that recently joined Buchanan Ingersoll, noted that it’s a practice with relatively consistent activity—ever more welcome in a market feeling the effects of [soft demand](#).

“You never hear a firm saying they’re not interested in labor and employment,” Levinson said. “I’m not surprised there’s a little more movement now with employment being so high.”

When a firm experiences a loss in that practice area, filling that gap is especially urgent, he said. (Although Buchanan Ingersoll CEO Joseph Dougherty said he was in talks with the Obermayer Rebmann group far before the Cozen O’Connor defectors left.)

A strong employment practice can attract corporate clients, Mannix said, making it an even greater priority for firm leaders. Now, that some momentum has built up, there’s no reason the lateral activity will stop in the near future, she said.

In general, Mannix said, the summer has been busier than expected for lateral movement. Levinson agreed.

“Firms are being extra aggressive,” he said. “We’re seeing a lot more firms that are willing to take risks than before.”

