

Illinois Powerhouse: Mayer Brown

By Celeste Bott

Law360 (September 5, 2019, 3:41 PM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP has long been a go-to firm for political issues in Chicago and throughout Illinois — and this year, that included guiding one of its former partners into her new role as Chicago's mayor.

Whether it be advising Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, acting as lead bond counsel for the city as it embarks on an \$8.5 billion plan to revamp Chicago O'Hare International Airport or ensuring the Obama Presidential Center could be built in Chicago's Jackson Park, it's been a busy year for the firm's government relations and public law group, whose work helped land Mayer Brown a spot among Law360's 2019 Illinois Powerhouses.

In fact, the practice group is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, said Joseph Seliga, a Mayer Brown partner who oversees the group in Chicago.

"It formed in 1989, and we've continued ever since that time to engage in this type of work," Seliga said. "We have attracted lawyers with these interests and prior experience in state and local government and been able to maintain that reputation."

Most recently, that includes the addition of former Illinois Deputy Solicitor General Brett Legner, who joined Mayer Brown's Chicago office this year. The global firm reports 376 attorneys working in Illinois alone, with nearly a thousand in the United States.

Still, the firm's roots are in Chicago, where it was founded in 1881, and it was Mayer Brown's Chicago office that advised on the original incorporations of Sears and Continental Bank, and counseled city leaders through the growth of Chicago's airport and the leasing of the Chicago Skyway, the first privatization of an American toll road, according to the firm.

Mayer Brown stands out in Illinois due in no small part to the cutting-edge transactional and regulatory work its attorneys do, and the firm has a long history of guiding government agencies through major public works projects, Seliga said.

"We've leveraged our Chicago and Illinois experience to be a nationwide practice in infrastructure," he said. "We're known as leaders in advising clients on infrastructure projects and public-private partnerships, due in part to the extensive work we've done in that arena in Chicago and Illinois."

This year, as counsel to Better Together Chicago, the transition committee established to support Lightfoot, the firm's lawyers helped create a nonprofit to facilitate the transition process and advised the city's new mayor — and their former colleague — on hiring decisions, compliance with city rules and her burgeoning agenda, the firm said.

Mayer Brown has also advised the city of Chicago in multiple transactions, including the financing of major airport capital improvements, it said.

The firm made headlines for securing a win for the city when an Illinois federal judge tossed an environmental group's bid to block former President Barack Obama from constructing a \$500 million presidential center on Chicago's South Side, rejecting the claim that it would be an improper use of public park land.

"It was a great collaboration between the city law department and our team," said Britt M. Miller, the partner-in-charge of the firm's Chicago office. "And that's just one example of our work with public-private partnerships on the legal side."

The firm has also seen big wins for its clients in data privacy cases, as litigation brought under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act continues to rise, Mayer Brown said.

"It's something we have developed an expertise in, that our clients appreciate and seek," Miller said. "We all know technology invades every aspect of our lives. Litigation trying to define the permissible reaches of technology is only going to grow as the technology grows."

In April, Mayer Brown attorneys successfully defended Shutterfly against some of the first lawsuits to challenge a private company's use of facial-recognition technology under BIPA, when the plaintiff voluntarily dismissed the case with prejudice, according to the firm.

And in September 2018, the firm's litigators secured a victory for CitiMortgage Inc. when an Illinois federal judge denied a motion to certify the proposed class in a nationwide TCPA case.

"These are relatively new areas of law that more and more companies are facing as they get involved in technology and consumer protection issues that perhaps they previously wouldn't be involved in," Miller said. "They're more keyed in now. And we got an early jump on it."

Other highlights the firm cites from the past year include the defeat of a putative nationwide class action alleging several global steel manufacturers, including its client ArcelorMittal, conspired to reduce capacity and inflate steel prices. Mayer Brown litigators took the lead on securing a win for all defendants at the Seventh Circuit, and a less favorable decision could have led to billions in damages, the firm said.

--Editing by Aaron Pelc.