

Ex-Fidelity Associate GC Returns To Mayer Brown In Chicago

By Jack Rodgers

Law360 (June 10, 2025, 4:43 PM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP has rehired the former co-chair of its practice focused on retirement benefit matters, who returns to the firm after helping to lead a team of attorneys at Fidelity Investments responsible for health and retirement plan litigation.

Rick Nowak rejoined Mayer Brown as a Chicago-based partner in the firm's litigation and dispute resolution practice, the firm announced Monday. Nowak, who focuses his practice on matters involving the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, or ERISA, was co-chair of Mayer Brown's ERISA litigation practice during his initial 10 years with the firm.



Rick Nowak

Nowak will continue representing plan sponsors, administrators, fiduciaries and trustees, as well as third-party service providers. He works with a range of benefit plans, such as defined contribution, defined benefit and nonqualified plans, the firm said.

Nowak left Mayer Brown in 2021 for Fidelity Investments, where he was vice president and associate general counsel, according to his LinkedIn profile.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse Tuesday, Nowak said he wanted to return to private practice because he also wanted to return to trial work. Part of why he left to go to Fidelity was to work for one of the largest retirement plan service providers, to get an industrywide view about what they value.

"If they're facing litigation, just because Fidelity has such a large market share, you also got to see, what are other firms in this space doing, from the defense side," Nowak said. "What works? What doesn't? Who's good at this? Who are the firms that go to trial? Who are the ones that do appeals? Who are the ones that just settle up?"

Nowak said he'd always thought about returning to private practice because at his core, he really enjoyed trials. He enjoys litigating matters and being in front of juries, and knew if he didn't return to that sort of work, his skills could atrophy.

"I thought to myself, 'If you're a trial lawyer, you can't be away for so long such that skills degrade,'" Nowak said.

Simultaneously, Nowak said, the ERISA litigation landscape had evolved since he was last in private practice — more plaintiff-side firms are pursuing a range of novel theories.

"I think there are a lot of good firms in this space, but I think there is an opportunity to really provide clients the best possible service from the defense perspective, and help them win these cases," Nowak said. "Because really, the only thing that's going to stem the tide of these cases are plan sponsors and other entities fighting and winning, because as long as they're settling, settlements beget more lawsuits."

He added: "I knew the people, and so I knew the culture, and I said, 'Out of all the firms, I know that Mayer Brown puts clients first,' and that's really what's important to me."

A graduate of the University of Illinois College of Law, Nowak was a summer associate at Mayer Brown, but took a role with the city of Chicago as a federal civil rights litigation division attorney.

He spent about a year in that role, then returned to Mayer Brown, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Michael Olsen, the firm's litigation and dispute resolution practice leader, said in a statement that the team was excited to have Nowak back at the firm.

"Rick's deep industry knowledge, proven leadership, and extensive experience in the field of ERISA litigation will further strengthen our position as a global powerhouse in employee benefits litigation," Olsen said in a statement. "His return is a key part of our strategic plan to expand our capabilities in Chicago and nationwide, and to ensure the continued growth and succession of our ERISA practice."

Joanna Horsnail, managing partner of the firm's Chicago office, said in a statement, "Rick's exceptional track record, industry relationships, and reputation and leadership in the ERISA litigation and broader benefits community will be invaluable as we continue to expand our capabilities and serve the needs of our clients." .

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.