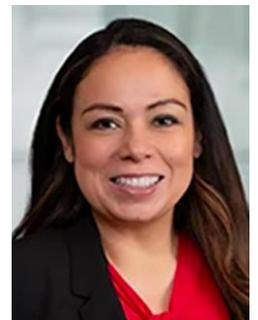


Former Philly City Solicitor Returns To Morgan Lewis

By James Boyle

Law360 (January 4, 2024, 4:10 PM EST) -- Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP welcomed the former city solicitor for Philadelphia back to its ranks this week after she left her position in the public sector in November to join a growing roster of ex-government officials filling up the law firm's Philly office.

Diana Cortes has returned to Morgan Lewis after more than 10 years to join the complex litigation practice as a partner in the Philadelphia office, the firm announced Wednesday. Cortes told Law360 Pulse on Thursday that she came back after leaving the firm in November 2013 because she considers the firm home.



Diana Cortes

"As an associate at Morgan Lewis, I partnered with brilliant attorneys who are my mentors to this day," Cortes said. "Besides providing me with stellar legal training, Morgan Lewis sponsored my development as an individual and a leader. Firm leadership saw my potential and encouraged me to pursue the opportunities that would optimize that potential."

Cortes first left Morgan Lewis in 2013 to serve as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia. In September 2015, she joined Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin PC, then went back to city government in May 2018 as chair of Philadelphia's litigation group in the law department.

About two years later, Cortes became Philadelphia's first Latina city solicitor, overseeing more than 215 lawyers and over 100 professional staff. She also served as general counsel for then-Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney's administration, as well as the City Council and all city departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

"Diana's extensive understanding of how to navigate the legal and governmental landscape will be instrumental to companies who are facing legal crises and reputational risk, particularly in the growing area of actions involving municipalities and state entities," Jami McKeon, chair of Morgan Lewis, said in a statement in October that initially announced Cortes' return. "We're seeing an increase in nationwide litigation and investigations involving consumer protection claims that are often led by municipalities and state attorneys general. Diana will enhance our ability to defend companies in these matters."

During her tenure in city government, Cortes played a crucial role helping Philadelphia manage its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She led the Philadelphia Law Department against numerous legal and policy challenges against COVID emergency orders.

According to Cortes, that experience has equipped her well as she develops her private practice at Morgan Lewis, where she will represent clients in crisis and handle complex litigation matters, including class actions, as well as criminal investigations.

"This background has prepared me well to advise on and against class action and large group litigation initiated by attorneys general and municipalities, advise clients on crisis management and ethics inquiries, and help defend against matters in Philadelphia and federal court," she said.

Cortes earned her law degree from Villanova University's Charles Widger School of Law in 2006 and started her career as a clerk for U.S. District Judge Juan Sánchez of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. In 2008, she joined Morgan Lewis as an associate.

"Diana is an exceptional trial lawyer who will strengthen our capacity nationwide, while offering unique and particular strength in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas and the Eastern District of Pennsylvania," J. Gordon Cooney Jr., leader of Morgan Lewis' litigation practice, said in the firm's statement. "Overseeing the large and varied docket of litigation involving the city, Diana has been deeply involved in several different municipality investigations and litigations that have involved various industries, including education, finance, and telecommunications. She will add a valuable perspective and differentiator to our crisis and complex litigation practices."

Cortes is the latest high-profile former government official to join Morgan Lewis' Philadelphia office. Kelly Gibson, who served as acting deputy director of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Division of Enforcement, director of the SEC's Philadelphia Regional Office, and leader of the commission's nationwide Climate and ESG Task Force, joined Morgan Lewis' New York and Philadelphia offices in February 2022.

In July 2022, Kathryn Deal, a former assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, moved to the firm. Dana Baiocco, formerly one of five commissioners on the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, was added to the firm as a partner in October 2022.

--Additional reporting by Matt Perez and Rachel Rippetoe. Editing by Covey Son.