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MVP: Morgan Lewis' Melissa Hill

By **Patrick Hoff**

Law360 (November 20, 2025, 4:00 PM EST) -- Melissa Hill of Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP helped Elon Musk defeat a proposed class action over severance benefits related to his $44 billion acquisition of Twitter and prevented class certification in a lawsuit accusing U.S. Bank of miscalculating workers' early retirement benefits, earning her a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 Benefits MVPs.

Melissa Hill
Morgan Lewis

Why she's a benefits attorney:

Hill said that when she arrived at Morgan Lewis about 17 years ago, she was coming from a smaller firm where she practiced general litigation and hadn't been excited by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act cases she'd handled. At Morgan Lewis, she was determined to be an employment attorney and never touch ERISA again.

But within months, Hill said, she was asked to work on one of the early cases challenging the fees and expenses charged by an employer's 401(k) plan, and she was hooked by the issues presented by ERISA.

"It really opened my eyes to what an interesting space ERISA is," Hill said. "It's an intricate, detailed, always-evolving area of the law, and that's something I enjoy, but also there's really direct and real implications on individuals, the employees and the companies who offer the employee benefits."

In April, Hill helped U.S. Bancorp defeat class certification in a lawsuit claiming the bank had unlawfully reduced monthly pension payments for employees who opted for early retirement, which narrowed the scope of the case and cut down on potential exposure for the company. The judge ruled that because the U.S. Bank pension plan included employees from several banks that merged and were subsumed with the U.S. Bank brand in the late 1990s and early 2000s, different plan participants had different combinations of benefits.

A Minnesota federal magistrate judge in August recommended certifying a narrower class of retirees, though Hill said the April decision has established a strong precedent for future cases by specifying the high standard for pursuing these types of claims.

"Our clients who are fiduciaries and plan sponsors, they want to do right by their employee participants, they want to do right by the law," Hill said. "And I really enjoy having the opportunity to work with them to devise solutions."

Her biggest accomplishment in the past year:

Hill said it's hard to pinpoint a specific accomplishment from the past year that rises above the others, but she's proud that she was able to achieve significant victories for clients across multiple industries and legal issues.

"The breadth and versatility of both my practice and the things I've achieved within my practice is something I'm really proud of and think is a big accomplishment," she said.

For example, Hill defended X Corp., formerly Twitter, and Elon Musk from a proposed class action of former employees who claimed they were owed $500 million in severance benefits for terminations that occurred after Musk purchased the social media company in October 2022. After Hill argued that the company didn't have a severance plan covered by ERISA, U.S. District Judge Trina L. Thompson dismissed the case in July 2024, saying the workers leading the case hadn't shown that federal benefits law was applicable.

Hill also helped Quest Diagnostics defeat a proposed class action claiming that it failed to remove underperforming investment funds from its $5 billion retirement plan. According to Hill, the proposed class could've included 40,000 individuals, and summary judgment in these types of cases is difficult for a defendant to achieve because arguments involving the fiduciary process are fact-intensive.

However, a New Jersey federal judge granted summary judgment to Quest in September 2024, determining that the company's management of the investments was sufficient. An appeal of the decision is pending before the Third Circuit.

Hill credited her colleagues within Morgan Lewis' ERISA practice group and the client teams she's partnered with for her success, saying the atmosphere they've cultivated has enriched her practice and made her an all-around happier lawyer.

"It's a really special space that we practice within the firm, and everyone has a meaningful role," Hill said. "Everyone makes contributions, everyone's encouraged to push themselves, to develop their skills, to devise thoughtful strategies. We're all in it together."

Her biggest challenge:

Hill said her biggest challenge in the past year was the same challenge she's faced in many other years, "and frankly, that probably most lawyers face" in their lives and careers: finding the right balance.

"It's a balance between all of the things that make up your day-to-day life," Hill said. "So, between all of the various cases that you might be working on, all the clients that you might be working for, and the demands that are placed on your schedule and the … intellectual demands that come with a robust, versatile practice. But also, how do you balance all of those demands in the broader context of the balance of life, and finding out how to carve out time for you, how to recharge and reset."

Hill added that it's also important to recognize when things are out of balance, because keeping a professional and personal equilibrium is key to doing the best legal work, delivering the best results for clients and being happy as an individual.

She noted that as an ERISA attorney, there are times when she needs to delve deeply into complicated matters to put her best foot forward.

"But you don't always have the luxury of that time," Hill said. "You don't always have the luxury of that mental capacity, and so making sure you find that time and find that mental capacity is an important part of the practice and something that remains a constant challenge."

Her advice to junior attorneys:

Hill said it's critical for younger attorneys to be curious and proactive in their work, both in the substance of the legal arguments they're making and in the legal profession as a whole.

"It helps to expand your knowledge, helps to open yourself up to new ideas, new opportunities, new experiences, new arguments, new strategies, new clients," Hill said. "So, if you have that curiosity, if you're constantly searching and being open for the next thing … I think it will really serve to enrich your practice, enhance your enjoyment of the practice of law, make you a better lawyer, a more critical thinker."

That's not to say attorneys should take their eyes off the present, she added, but keeping an open mind to new opportunities and knowledge can be invaluable, no matter how long someone has been practicing. Hill said she continues to strive to keep an open mind about how she practices law, the arguments she presents, and opportunities both within and outside her firm to challenge herself.

"The things that I will be curious about today in my practice will be very different than what a junior lawyer should be curious about," she said, "and what I was curious about 20 years ago was different than what I'm curious about and what I'm driving towards today."

--As told to Patrick Hoff. Editing by Amy French.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2025 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.
