

Illinois Powerhouse: Jenner & Block

By **Madeline Lyskawa**

Law360 (August 9, 2022, 2:02 PM EDT) --Jenner & Block LLP's well-rounded and accomplished litigation team, along with its immense pro bono commitments, landed it at the forefront of Illinois' legal industry in 2021, with its top litigators guiding USA Gymnastics through its Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings and advocating for detainees in a pro bono suit against the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Citing Illinois' strong benches, courts and judges, Dean Panos, partner and co-chair of the firm's food, beverage and consumer law practice, told Law360 that Chicago is "a hotbed of legal talent." Jenner & Block stands in that "hotbed" as a leader, earning the firm a spot in Law360's 2022 Illinois Powerhouse series.

With 242 attorneys in Illinois, and 466 attorneys making up the firm's total headcount, Chicago-based Jenner & Block represents a number of corporations headquartered in Illinois, including McDonald's Corp., The Kraft Heinz Co. and Kellogg Co., and covers a wide array of litigation matters, like defending Kellogg against consumers' claims regarding the labeling of the company's strawberry Pop-Tarts.

"Even though we're based in Chicago, we represent a ton of Chicago companies both in their litigation in Chicago, but also across the nation in courtrooms all over the United States, and we also assist them with their cross-border matters," Debbie Berman, partner and co-chair of the firm's business litigation practice and Chicago co-chair of its pro bono committee, told Law360.

Over the past year, Jenner & Block — which was founded in 1914 — has represented baby food manufacturers who have been hard-hit by allegations that their products contain toxic heavy metals, as well as consumer products companies facing suits over the presence of PFAS chemicals in their products, Panos said.

For Kraft Heinz and Mondelez International Inc., Jenner & Block represented the companies in claims lodged by the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission and consumers accusing them of manipulating the wheat futures markets.

Drawing on its expertise in the insurance coverage realm, Jenner & Block is also backing Mondelez in its pursuit of more than \$100 million from Zurich American Insurance Co. for damages related to the



massive NotPetya malware attack. The trial is expected to take place in October in Illinois state court, Panos said.

At the end of last year, Jenner & Block also secured the dismissal of two suits brought by customers of Commonwealth Edison and its parent company Exelon, another of the firm's long-standing clients. The customers were seeking damages over rates that had been determined by two Illinois statutes. The litigation against Illinois' largest electrical utility stemmed from its role in conspiring with the state's speaker of its House of Representatives to pass legislation that benefited it. The companies accepted a deferred prosecution agreement.

In one of the most-watched bankruptcy cases of the last year, Jenner & Block also guided USA Gymnastics through its bankruptcy proceedings, culminating in a successful case plan confirmation at the end of last year and a \$380 million settlement for victims of former team doctor Larry Nassar. That deal was three and a half years in the making.

The plan, which was jointly supported by USA Gymnastics and the survivors' committee, was important to both the organization and to the firm, Melissa Root, managing partner of the Chicago office and co-chair of the bankruptcy and restructuring practice, told Law360.

Considering the national importance and significance of the matter, Panos said, a large part of the firm's work in dealing with the bankruptcy proceeding was understanding the larger picture relating to Nassar's widespread abuse of the gymnasts.

In addition to its work with USA Gymnastics, Jenner & Block also led an internal review for the Chicago Blackhawks and released a public report detailing its investigation into allegations that a former hockey player for the team was sexually assaulted by an assistant coach. The firm's work coincided with the launch of its culture risk and sensitive investigations practice in July of last year.

Outside the sports arena, Jenner & Block also backed pension holders in their fight to block Puerto Rico from making drastic cuts to their pensions, which Root said ended successfully with no cuts being made at the end of 2021.

"It's an important part of the bankruptcy system to provide a committee, to provide a voice to folks who are being affected, whether it's corporate restructuring or municipality or a territory like Puerto Rico, and that's some of the work that we just really treasure," Root said.

Jenner & Block's commitment to pro bono work is also a defining feature of the firm, Root said.

"I think pro bono and civic commitment is just ingrained in the firm, it's part of who we are. It's rewarding to serve our communities in that way, but it also makes for really good colleagues," Root said.

A couple of the larger pro bono initiatives Jenner & Block has focused on over the past year include representing Afghans seeking to flee Afghanistan and secure humanitarian parole, as well as Illinois prison detainees in their proposed class action seeking to secure better living conditions for approximately 1,000 prisoners.

Some of the firm's other notable pro bono work includes helping transgender individuals secure name changes — something Berman said she recently worked on for a 5-year-old.

"For that child to be able to be called by the name that he wants to be called by was life changing for him," Berman said.

For Berman and Panos, who have each been with Jenner & Block for 32 years, and Root, who has worked with the firm for 17 years, its consistent values and commitment to the community are what have prompted each of them to stay with the firm for most, if not all, of their careers, they told Law360.

By looking forward and understanding the value of investing in its future leaders, Berman said that Jenner & Block is dedicated to ensuring the next generation of trial lawyers through programs it offers its associates, including setting up mock trials with retired judges and allowing associates to gain trial experience in pro bono cases.

--Editing by Kristen Becker.