

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Laura Kathryn O'Boyle

By Dean Seal

Law360 (September 17, 2019, 5:41 PM EDT) -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP partner Laura Kathryn O'Boyle successfully defended Susquehanna Growth Equity against fraud charges related to its sale of an e-commerce payment processing business, helped Merck & Co. beat a shareholder suit, and is representing Marriott International Inc. in a multidistrict litigation related to its November data breach, making her one of five securities attorneys under 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

WHAT MOTIVATED HER TO BECOME A LAWYER:

The Stanford Law grad says she's always loved mathematics and economics, and after studying public policy in undergrad, she realized that she could merge her interests by heading to law school and learning how to address complex problems on a day-to-day basis.

"When I went to law school, I knew I wanted to be a litigator," O'Boyle said. "I'd seen what lawyers do and from day one, I knew that having a problem dropped on my desk and figuring out the best way to solve it for the client was something that would be an engaging career long-term."

WHAT DREW HER TO SECURITIES LITIGATION:

When O'Boyle joined Gibson Dunn in 2006, one of her first cases was the massive securities fraud litigation faced by Marsh & McLennan Cos. over an alleged kickback scheme — a rare securities suit that nearly made it all the way through discovery before a settlement was reached.

Jumping into that case as an associate, O'Boyle quickly learned that millions of factors drive a business' every decision and disclosure, and understanding those motivations are key to successfully defending major companies. Her interest was piqued at an early stage, she said.

"It's weird to say 'I love being a securities litigator,'" O'Boyle said with a laugh. "But you have to understand the full scope of the situation and see a much broader picture than plaintiffs' lawyers try to paint."

RISING
 ★★★★★
STAR



Laura Kathryn O'Boyle
Gibson Dunn

Age: 39

Home base: New York

Position: Partner

Law school: Stanford Law School

First job after law school: Associate at Gibson Dunn

“We deal with clients in all industries, and it presents the type of problem solving that drove me to law in the first place,” she added.

THE FUTURE OF SECURITIES LITIGATION:

O’Boyle is the co-lead in Gibson Dunn’s representation of Marriott as it fends off a shareholder suit and derivative action related to the data breach the company disclosed in November.

While O’Boyle feels certain that Marriott will be cleared of any wrongdoing, given that the breach was the result of a criminal act, she notes that there isn’t a lot of case law governing the nexus between cybersecurity and securities law.

“There are a lot of cases that have been filed in just the past two to three years, so you're going to see a lot of law being made in our case and the other cases that are proceeding through motion practice right now,” O’Boyle said. “It’s a very exciting area to be working in because, yes, it’s a securities fraud claim, but the intersection with cybersecurity and the ability to develop law in this area makes it fascinating.”

HER WORK OUTSIDE OF SECURITIES PRACTICE:

When she’s not defending companies like Merck and Susequehanna from high-dollar securities suits, O’Boyle is devoting her time to pro bono asylum applications.

O’Boyle said she’s continuously had one or two active asylum matters on her desk since she joined Gibson Dunn, and enjoys the opportunity to work with clients to achieve what will likely be the most important outcome of their lives.

“Each asylum client I have represented has been granted asylum, and really, the ability to help someone in such an important matter in their life is one of the most meaningful things I’ve done as a lawyer,” she said.

As a partner, O’Boyle has been able to focus more time on asylum applications, either directly or alongside associates. While their differences might be obvious, O’Boyle said the similarities between her pro bono work and her securities practice are fundamental: “Presenting the facts and your client’s story, whether its a company or an individual, in the most compelling way possible.”

“So much of the asylum application is really working with your client to understand and develop all of the facts and reasons why they fear persecution in their home country and why they are entitled to asylum in the U.S.,” she said.

“Trying to understand the amount of fear and persecution someone feels is devastating,” she added. “It is definitely emotionally taxing, but extremely rewarding when we get a successful outcome.”

— *As told to Dean Seal*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 years old as of April 30, 2019, in order to be considered for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.