

Employment Group Of The Year: Seyfarth

By Anne Cullen

Law360 (February 9, 2026, 4:03 PM EST) -- Seyfarth Shaw LLP's employment team locked in an arbitration win for an energy company accused of wage violations, successfully defended Seattle in a pandemic-related battle and shut down a long-running California labor code suit against Columbia Sportswear, earning the firm a place among the 2025 Law360 Employment Groups of the Year.

The firm has a well-equipped labor and employment practice, boasting more than 420 attorneys working across its 13 domestic offices, as well as in some of its international outposts. Seyfarth's employment subspecialties — including wage and hour, discrimination, benefits and arbitration — are part of their recipe for success, said firm partner Ariel D. Cudkowicz.

"The unique way that we are structured, in terms of our subject-matter teams, really allows us to bring to the table some creativity," said Cudkowicz, who co-chairs Seyfarth's employment litigation and counseling practice group.

Cudkowicz said their ability to collaborate across these specialty areas helped them notch a mid-2024 arbitration win in a Fair Labor Standards Act dispute on behalf of energy company Energy Transfer, a result a federal court confirmed at the tail end of 2024.

The dispute was brought by a former Prime Energy Services worker who sought to hold Energy Transfer liable as a joint employer, because it contracted with Prime Energy Services. An arbitrator disagreed, finding Energy Transfer's safety-related oversight of Prime Energy Services did not translate into liability for the employee's FLSA claim.

"It was one of these cases that allowed us to bring to bear one of our strengths," Cudkowicz said. "This was a melding of some of our subject-matter experts around arbitration with wage and hour practitioners."

Beyond a depth of expertise in the traditional employment law arenas, Seyfarth keeps a close eye on cutting-edge, evolving legal issues, said Laura J. Maechtlen, who chairs the firm's national labor and employment department.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Maechtlen said her team kept on top of the rapidly shifting legal landscape,



and that agility meant they weren't caught flat-footed by the ensuing torrent of pandemic-related litigation. Seyfarth has been at the "leading edge" of these kinds of cases, she said.

In October, for example, Seyfarth secured summary judgment for Seattle in a lawsuit brought by current and former municipal employees who challenged the city's COVID-19 vaccination mandate. Dozens of workers, who sued in Washington's King County Superior Court, said Seattle failed to accommodate their religious beliefs in contravention of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and terminations made pursuant to the inoculation policy violated Washington's Law Against Discrimination.

Before convincing the court to close down the case entirely, Seyfarth was able to pare it back in the earlier phases of litigation. In June, for example, the court awarded Seattle summary judgment on dozens of workers' claims, leaving just four plaintiffs in the case. The court then handed Seattle a complete win in October.

Seyfarth's strategic fracturing of the case showcased its "aggressive early litigation techniques" that can have a big impact on the outcome of litigation, Maechtlen said.

"This was a good example of a type of case that shows how careful litigation management can resolve large, politically charged employment cases without prolonged trials or settlement phases," Maechtlen said.

Her department's penchant for long-term litigation strategy additionally helped them secure summary judgment in June on behalf of Columbia Sportswear in a decade-long case alleging wage and hour issues and violations of California's Private Attorneys General Act.

Outside the courtroom, Maechtlen said she's proud of the work that Seyfarth has done in the diversity, equity and inclusion space, both in the past year and prior.

Maechtlen said Seyfarth had been helping clients stand up lawful DEI programs long before these initiatives became a political flashpoint under the current administration, and that her team continues to do so. Maechtlen co-chairs the firm's national inclusion and belonging team, a unit focused on Seyfarth internally; the firm's team shepherding clients through DEI challenges is its people analytics practice.

"It wasn't something that, because of the events of this year, we pivoted and created a group around it," Maechtlen said. "It was something we had advised on for a long time."

--Editing by Dave Trumbore.