

Philly's City Solicitor To Rejoin Morgan Lewis

By James Boyle

Law360 (October 2, 2023, 4:15 PM EDT) -- Philadelphia's first Latina chief legal officer has announced she is leaving the public sector to restart her private practice at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP.

Diana Cortes will step down as Philadelphia's city solicitor on Nov. 23 to join Morgan Lewis as a partner in the firm's complex litigation practice group in Philadelphia, according to a statement from Mayor Jim Kenney's office. She will be replaced by First Deputy City Solicitor Kristin Bray, who will act as interim city solicitor.

Cortes said in a statement that she will miss her colleagues in city government and expressed confidence in Bray's leadership.

"I have had an incredible tenure where we as a city had to address unprecedented legal and policy issues," Cortes said. "I am grateful and blessed to have worked with an Administration, City Council and Law Department that were motivated to do what was right for the city, and not what was easy. I have an incredible opportunity to return to Morgan Lewis, where I first learned to practice law, now at the highest level."

Cortes was not immediately available for further comment.

When she joins Morgan Lewis next month, Cortes' practice will represent clients in complex litigation matters, such as class actions, and criminal investigations. Cortes' work will draw heavily upon her five-and-a-half years as part of Philadelphia's law department and the mayor's cabinet.

"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. "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."

Cortes earned her law degree from Villanova University's Charles Widger School of Law in 2006. After clerking for two years for U.S. District Judge Juan Sánchez in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Cortes joined Morgan Lewis in October 2008.



Diana Cortes

She left the firm in November 2013 for her first foray into public service as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia. After two years, Cortes went back to private practice with Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin PC in September 2015, then joined the city's law department as chair of the litigation group in May 2018. In December 2020, Cortes was named city solicitor, making her the first Latina to hold the cabinet position. As leader of the city's law department, Cortes oversaw more than 215 lawyers and over 100 professional staff. She also served as general counsel to Kenney's administration, the city council and all city departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

"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 a 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."

--Editing by Peter Rozovsky.