

DOJ Assistant Anti-Bribery Unit Chief Joins Mayer Brown

By Alison Knezevich

Law360 (September 4, 2024, 7:02 AM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP announced Wednesday it is bolstering its global investigations and white collar defense practice with the addition of a U.S. Department of Justice Foreign Corrupt Practices Act unit official who led more than 50 investigations under the anti-bribery law.

Sonali D. Patel joins the firm as a partner in Washington, D.C., after serving as assistant chief of the DOJ unit. Her work there included the sprawling case related to bribery allegations at *Petróleos de Venezuela SA*, Venezuela's state-owned oil company.

The strength of Mayer Brown's white collar practice and the quality of its "whip smart" lawyers are among the factors that attracted her to the firm, she told *Law360 Pulse* in an interview.

Patel joined the FCPA unit in 2018, serving as a trial attorney before becoming assistant chief in 2021. In addition to the PDVSA probe, her significant matters include a case against two former Cognizant Technology Solutions executives accused of authorizing a \$2 million bribe to an Indian official.

Previously, she was an assistant U.S. attorney in D.C, where she worked on fraud, public corruption and cyber-related cases.

Patel, who began her legal career as an associate at Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP after graduating from law school at the University of Pennsylvania, told *Law360 Pulse* she always thought she might return to private practice, "but it was never really the right time."

Earlier this year, as some of her cases were "coming to a natural end," she said, "I thought it might be a good time to put my hat in the ring and see what opportunities were available in the private sector."

When she interviewed at Mayer Brown, she was impressed with the people she met, she said.

Jason Linder, co-chair of the investigations and white collar defense practice, called Patel "a strategic and highly respected FCPA litigator."

"With corporate enforcement increasing, our clients will be well served by her experience leading high-stakes international matters at the DOJ and U.S. Attorney's Office," Linder, who is also a former FCPA prosecutor, said in a statement.



Sonali D. Patel

Patel said that with authorities around the world ramping up enforcement, it's often "no longer the case that the United States is the only country" scrutinizing a matter.

"I think we'll continue to see a lot more cross-border cases [and] companies that are facing scrutiny in more than one jurisdiction," she said.

Patel is the latest former government official to join Mayer Brown's Washington location, and D.C. managing partner Andrew Olmem said in a statement that "high-profile enforcement and litigation work is a core focus of the D.C. office."

This spring, the firm welcomed Jennifer Zepralka, who served as chief of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Office of Small Business Policy.

Since last year, the D.C. office has also added former Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, who was the U.S. ambassador to Russia; Kimberly Hamm, who was chief counsel to former U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Jay Clayton and to former U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.; and Adam Hickey, a former deputy assistant attorney general with DOJ's National Security Division.

—Additional reporting by Carla Baranauckas, Anna Sanders, Katryna Perera and Andrea Keckley. Editing by Michael Watanabe.