

## NY Law Firm Taps Kirkland Partner to Launch in Chicago

By Andrew Maloney

### What You Need to Know

- Buffalo law firm Phillips Lytle has opened in Chicago with former Kirkland partner John Worth.
- Worth said he's hoping to leverage his relationships with big clients and with his former firm to help build the new office.
- Chicago has seen several new Big Law players enter the market during the COVID-19 era.

Another law firm has swooped into the Windy City.

Midsized law firm Phillips Lytle has recruited longtime Kirkland & Ellis litigation partner John Worth to launch a Chicago office, where the firm will focus on building out complex commercial litigation, product liability, mass tort and other litigation areas.

The firm's launch is another sign that law firms continue to see opportunity in Chicago, even after a host of firms have

opened and expanded in the city in the last two and a half years, including Cooley, Norton Rose Fulbright, Willkie Farr & Gallagher, Dickinson Wright, Crowell & Moring and Venable. Law firms are attracted to the city's strong financial business base and the ability to charge premium billing rates.

Worth, who was a Kirkland partner for 12 years, said in an interview that he's continuing work for a base of clients that includes Fortune 500 companies and ones that are primarily in the oil and gas and petrochemical industries.

He said he'll lean on the pipeline he cultivated at Kirkland to help build the Chicago practice at 140-attorney Phillips Lytle, which has its roots in Buffalo, New York.

"I have a very strong relationship with many of the folks I worked with at Kirkland. And typically, you run into situations—and I ran into this as a partner at Kirkland—for one



Courtesy photo

**John Worth, a partner and leader of the Chicago office of Phillips Lytle.**

reason or another, the firm needs to find alternative representation in a particular locale," Worth said.

"And so through those relationships at Kirkland, there is a fertile ground for referrals to come into Phillips Lytle for matters in jurisdictions where I'm admitted, which is in Michigan and Illinois, as well as the broader Phillips Lytle firm, which operates primarily in New York state," he added.

Worth said bringing in new business by forging meaningful relationships with clients is something he's worked on "almost

unconsciously from the start at Kirkland.” He said he’ll be offering a different value proposition at Phillips Lytle, but the core attributes of that focus are the same.

His billing rates will still be competitive with other major firms in Chicago, he said, but being at a smaller firm now, he can offer more flexibility for clients along with the experience of someone who spent nearly two decades at Kirkland.

Chicago is known for being a litigation-heavy market. Additionally, it remains one of the top 10 most desirable locations for Big Law firms to grow or expand in 2022, according to a recent ALM/LawVision survey.

Law firms based in Chicago enjoyed relatively high revenue and demand in the first half of the year compared with firms in other parts of the country, according to Wells Fargo’s Legal Specialty Group.

Chicago firms, for instance, grew revenue 7% in the first half, above the national survey average of 6%, according to Wells Fargo analysts. While expenses increased at these firms more so than the national average, net income decreased 9%, a bit

better than the national average. Meanwhile, demand at Chicago firms grew 3.5%, ahead of the national survey average of essentially being flat (0.2%). Rate increases were also higher than the national average.

Worth said he isn’t phased by competition in Chicago, because his practice and the office he wants to build is national in scope.

Besides him, the firm has a paralegal, a secretary, and an associate starting soon in Chicago, with a couple of other associates on the way, he added. He said the market will dictate how much the office grows, but he doesn’t want to be in a position where they have to turn down work because of a lack of capacity.

He said he’s not sure if and where the firm might open next but that firm leaders will keep a close eye on Chicago to help determine future expansion.

“The goal is to expand Chicago, build it to a sizable office that can support the litigation practice I’m bringing in as well as the referrals that will come in, as well as Phillips Lytle’s existing Midwestern client base, and then think down the road about potential expansions into other markets,” Worth said.

In a statement, firm managing partner Kevin Hogan said Worth is joining Phillips Lytle “amid a recent stretch of rapid growth and hiring, creating a moment of opportunity.”

Worth said he was ready to leave Kirkland, the highest-grossing law firm in the world, not only because of the opportunity to lead an office but because of a deep-seated desire for a more independent type of entrepreneurship.

“I’m the son of a small-town solo practitioner, and it was really a part of the practice of law that I saw growing up that I really wanted to sort of test for myself and have the opportunity to develop for myself,” Worth said.

Kirkland said in a statement that it has enjoyed working with Worth and wishes “him luck in his career.”

