

Cozen O'Connor Welcomes Five Lawyers Nationally Renowned in the Institutional Response to Misconduct

Monday, February 6, 2017

Philadelphia, February 6, 2017 — Cozen O'Connor is pleased to announce that five nationally renowned attorneys in the field of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence and child protection have joined the firm, launching the country's premier Institutional Response Group. The five highly accomplished lawyers joining the firm include Gina Maisto Smith, Leslie M. Gomez, Megan L. Traversari, and Lauren C. Carella, all of whom are formerly of Pepper Hamilton LLP; also joining is Maureen P. Holland, formerly of Hamburg & Golden, P.C. Smith, chair, and Gomez, vice chair, will lead the Institutional Response Group (IRG).

The Philadelphia-based attorneys represent colleges, universities, K-12 educational and other child-serving institutions, as well as corporations, hospitals, religious institutions, and not-for-profit organizations. A key focus of the IRG is designing, implementing, and enhancing institutional responses to sexual and gender-based harassment and violence, child abuse, and other forms of criminal conduct. The IRG has 10 pillars of practice: policy development and audit; design of infrastructure, systems, and protocols; investigations; training and education; Title IX, Clery and other regulatory compliance; coordination with law enforcement and parallel investigations; counseling and advice; institutional governance; community engagement; and public service. Cozen O'Connor's new group of attorneys have decades of experience conducting high-profile sexual violence and child abuse investigations, and assisting institutions in implementing trauma-informed, fair and impartial processes for the prevention and resolution of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence, child abuse, and other forms of misconduct.

Smith and Gomez are known to be thought leaders in the field and are passionate about changing the nation's conversations around sexual violence and child abuse. Smith and Gomez have been the go-to attorneys in higher education for high-profile investigations and effective institutional responses. Public engagements include high-profile sexual misconduct investigations and engagements at Baylor University (investigating the university's response to sexual violence broadly and as it relates to the university's football program), the University of Virginia (rebuilding campus policies and practices in the wake of the Rolling Stone's flawed indictment of the campus), Amherst College, Occidental College, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In addition, Holland and Carella, both former prosecutors, regularly conduct Title IX investigations for educational institutions, and Traversari has a long-standing investigative practice in the white collar, government, and regulatory agencies, and pharmaceutical industries.

"We could not be more excited to welcome this accomplished group of lawyers, and in doing so we are launching the nation's "go-to" practice in compassionate and compliant institutional responses," says Michael J. Heller, president and CEO of Cozen O'Connor. "Together they bring a unique combination of prosecutorial experience, investigative skills, understanding of trauma and the human issues of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence, and substantive knowledge surrounding Title IX, the Clery Act, criminal law, child abuse laws, and intersecting privacy laws. They are considered the gold standard in this growing field which is of critical concern in the education space and all institutions."

Smith and Gomez started their careers in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office prosecuting sexual assault, child abuse, and domestic violence. In 2005, after nearly 20 years as a public servant, Smith left the District Attorney's Office as an assistant district attorney in the Homicide Unit to create



Gina Maisto Smith
Chair, Institutional Response Group

gmsmith@cozen.com
Phone (215) 665-5540
Fax (215) 665-2013

Related Practice Areas

- Institutional Response Group
- Subrogation & Recovery

the nation's first practice dedicated to the institutional response to sexual misconduct. Rather than a traditional civil litigation practice, Smith's vision incorporated a nuanced understanding of trauma and the dynamics of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence as they impact individuals, institutions, and communities to assist institutions in implementing effective and holistic responses that tend to student welfare and campus safety. In 2011, Smith recruited Gomez, with nearly 15 years in the District Attorney's Office, most recently as the chief of the Juvenile Unit, to help build the practice. Smith and Gomez joined Pepper Hamilton LLP in 2013, where they built an expansive and dynamic practice representing hundreds of public and private institutions across the country.

"The opportunity to bring our practice to a firm of Cozen O'Connor's caliber is tremendous," said Smith. "Cozen O'Connor's innovative and entrepreneurial approach and expansive national footprint provide the perfect platform for continued growth of the practice."

"We have seen continuing demand for the unique services we provide and are excited to be able to expand available resources," added Gomez. "We look forward to running our own practice group and building a dynamic and talented team at Cozen O'Connor."

Smith and Gomez regularly speak at national conferences and forums focusing on sexual and gender-based violence, child abuse, Title IX, and the labyrinth of federal, state, and local laws that inform institutional responses. Smith recently sat on panels at the Stanford Criminal Law Symposium and the New York Times Leaders in Higher Ed Forum; she also participates in the American Law Institute project on Campus Sexual Assault and Futures Without Violence training program. Gomez serves as a faculty member for ChildFirst Pennsylvania, a training program that teaches forensic interviewing of children to law enforcement and child protective services agencies. Smith and Gomez advocate for holistic solutions to the challenging dynamics of campus sexual assault and have most recently authored two thought-provoking articles proposing an innovative regional Center for Investigation and Adjudication in the Penn State Law Review and the American Bar Association's Dispute Resolution Magazine. Smith and Gomez also authored a chapter in Campus Sexual Assault Response Teams: Program Development and Operational Management.

Holland and Traversari are joining as members and Carella is joining as counsel.

About Cozen O'Connor

Established in 1970 and ranked among the top 100 law firms in America, Cozen O'Connor has more than 925 attorneys who help clients manage risk and make better business decisions. The firm counsels clients on their most sophisticated legal matters in all areas of the law, including litigation, corporate and regulatory law. Representing a broad array of leading global corporations and middle market companies, Cozen O'Connor services its clients' needs through 26 offices across two continents.

###