

Porter Wright Opens In Pittsburgh With Ex-K&L Gates Partner

By **Nicole Narea**

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Columbus, Ohio-based Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP has hired a new partner-in-charge, an 18-year veteran of employment-based immigration law, to spearhead the opening of its new office in Pittsburgh, marking the firm's first organic growth in three decades.

Ellen Freeman, formerly of K&L Gates LLP, opened Porter Wright's new office on Aug. 30, launching her immigration practice and initiating the hiring process to build up what will soon become a full-service location. The firm said in a statement that its decision to expand to Pittsburgh was driven by the city's business and legal community, as well as the availability of top talent to aid it in serving existing clients.



Ellen Freeman

Freeman, originally from Ukraine, counsels clients in the fields of biotech, information technology, health care and education, advising them on global mobility, outbound immigration, employment-based petitions, labor certification, consular processing and, notably, visa waivers for foreign medical graduates, among other immigration avenues.

"I am extremely excited to be the first foreign-born female managing partner in not only Pittsburgh, but also Pennsylvania," Freeman told Law360 on Monday. "Porter Wright has great bench strength, old steeped history and an impressive immigration group."

Though Freeman said she began practicing immigration law by coincidence, her interest in the subject had roots in her early professional life. After graduating from college, Freeman worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, resettling Jewish refugees during a 1992 civil war in the Russian-speaking part of Moldova before she herself immigrated to the U.S., where she eventually attended law school.

Freeman said immigration law has kept her interest because the field is constantly in flux — particularly so under the Trump administration. She cited the White House's habit of dropping major changes to the immigration policy framework on Friday nights and updating the online Foreign Affairs Manual, which guides visa officers in how they adjudicate immigration cases, with no notice.

"I think it's been the most stressful time ever to be an immigration lawyer," she said. "Immigration

lawyers came to be at the forefront of this fight against Trump policies.”

Freeman remains an active member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and also serves on an editorial advisory board for Law 360’s immigration coverage.

As Freeman has transitioned her immigration law clients to Porter Wright, she has also set out to ready herself for her role as a managing partner, asking colleagues at the firm to act as her “Jedi masters,” she said. She added that she has long hoped to expand her horizons beyond her own practice by allocating time between different dockets and learning about other practice areas in an administrative role.

“Finding someone of Ellen’s caliber and capability made the decision to expand into Pittsburgh an easy one,” Robert Tannous, Porter Wright’s managing partner, said in a statement. “We are excited to grow our Pittsburgh presence and build upon that vision, always with an eye to how we can benefit our clients and advance client service.”

Freeman received her masters of public and international affairs from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and her law degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. She also holds an M.A. in Russian language in literature with awards from Odessa National University.

--Editing by Sara Ziegler.