

Rising Star: Mayer Brown's Brantley Webb

By Benjamin Morse

Law360 (July 5, 2023, 1:01 PM EDT) -- Brantley Webb of Mayer Brown LLP has led major clients to success in high-dollar benefits suits, including a recent across-the-board win for Yale University in a case surrounding the administration of a \$5.5 billion retirement plan, earning her a spot among the benefit law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

The biggest case she's worked on:

Webb said the biggest case of her career is *Vellali et al. v. Yale University et al.*, a case dating back to 2016 accusing Yale of violating the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 by failing to monitor the university's retirement plan adequately and correct its course when necessary.

She described what it was like in the courtroom when the jury handed down a decision in favor of her client in June, ruling that Yale proved that a prudent fiduciary "could have made the same decisions as to recordkeeping and administrative fees" that the university made.

"It was very powerful to be in the room ... after having worked that hard for that long, to get the verdict for Yale in person," Webb said. "It meant a tremendous amount to me and to our whole team, and obviously to our clients. It was a very complex excessive fees case that was litigated for years, but having it resolved in that way, with a jury of our peers finding for Yale, was pretty overpowering."

The most interesting case she's worked on lately and what made it so interesting:

Webb said the most interesting case she has worked on is also the most recent, *Vellali v. Yale*, citing the complex claims involved in the case.

"A big part of that trial and case was going in-depth into recordkeeping structure and fees, and looking at investment funds and how fiduciaries monitor investment funds and performance,"

2023



Brantley Webb

Mayer Brown

Age: 39

Home base: Washington, D.C.

Position: Partner

Law school: Yale Law School

First job after law school:

Internship in Washington, D.C.,
with Defenders of Wildlife

Webb said. "There were a lot of experts. I think being able to go in-depth into all of those subjects and sort of tie everything together for the jury in that case was a very interesting and difficult task for our team."

Why she chose to go into benefits law:

Webb said that a "very brilliant" attorney, Brian Netter, a former Mayer Brown partner who is now with the U.S. Department of Justice, pulled her into the field of benefits law.

Netter "pulled me into my sort of first real case on behalf of Columbia University years ago and just sort of threw me into the case," Webb said. "I found the work to be really interesting. A lot of people, when they hear ERISA, just want to run away. But I think that when you actually get into the cases and look at the kinds of decisions that fiduciaries make and their job to administer these huge retirement plans with all the complexities and concerns of the participants about having choice of their investments, the subjects are actually very interesting and very relevant to pretty much every single person who wants to retire."

How she thinks the practice and the legal industry will change in the next 10 years:

Webb said that she hopes the number of excessive fees cases will go down in the future.

"I do think there are too many cases right now, and it's very stressful for companies, for nonprofits, who are trying to administer retirement plans. I hope that the field will narrow in that respect," Webb said.

Webb also said a renewed focus on environmental, social and governance funds is likely to impact her field going forward.

"One of the interesting things about this space is that fiduciaries to retirement plans are always having to adapt and evolve to the latest developments, both on the administrative side and also on the investment side," Webb said. "So ESG funds have been around for a while, but lately they have gotten much more popular, and there's a demand for them."

Webb also mentioned the legal challenges that some ESG funds have sparked and expects more down the line.

— *As told to Benjamin Morse.*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2023 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,350 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of May 1, 2023, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.