

## Gfeller Laurie Opens Philly Office, Adds Attys In PA, NJ And CT

By James Boyle

*Law360 (October 29, 2021, 3:36 PM EDT)* -- Midsize law firm Gfeller Laurie LLP went through a growth spurt this week, opening a new Philadelphia office and adding four attorneys to its northeast locations in Philadelphia; West Hartford, Connecticut; and Princeton, New Jersey.

Gfeller Laurie launched its Philadelphia office in October at One Liberty Place on Market Street when it welcomed liability attorney Chimdi G. Tuffs to the firm. Founding partner Robert D. Laurie told Law360 Pulse in a phone interview on Friday that the Philadelphia market has always been a target for the firm, but they couldn't find the right person to lead it until Tuffs.

"We have a number of clients with business in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia," Laurie said. "We have always looked to build on that, and we haven't had the opportunity to capitalize until we met Chimdi. After meeting with her, the partners knew Chimdi was the person to build our Philadelphia presence around and the person to present to our clients as the one leading the charge in Pennsylvania."

Tuffs is the only attorney in the Philadelphia office right now, Laurie said, though the firm has plans to organically expand the office when opportunities arise.

Tuffs told Law360 Pulse that joining the firm after three and a half years as an associate with Goldberg Segalla was the right move for her to evolve her practice and responsibilities.

"I've been on the associate level for a number of years and felt prepared to become a partner and engage in a partnership," Tuffs said. "When I was approached by Bob, it was perfect timing. I am very ready to make this kind of transition. I feel a lot of potential being in this office and navigating the litigation needs for clients in Pennsylvania."

Tuffs represents employers and corporations in complex litigation matters, such as premises liability, personal injury, trucking liability, insurance coverage and product liability matters. She is also looking to expand her work into other practice areas to better fit clients' needs.

"I am always about putting my best foot forward to meet client satisfaction," Tuffs said. "I am hopeful



Chimdi G. Tuffs



Lisa A. Stefano

that will translate into building a brand here in Pennsylvania. The work and the practice should speak for itself in terms of advertising."

Originally from West Chester, Pennsylvania, in the Philadelphia suburbs, Tuffs received her law degree from Temple University's James E. Beasley School of Law in 2012. She started her legal career as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia and then moved to New York in 2015 as an assistant district attorney for Richmond County on Staten Island.

Tuffs returned to Pennsylvania and moved into private practice in 2017 as an associate with Hill Wallack LP in Yardley, then went to Goldberg Segalla in April 2018.

"My work as an ADA in Philly is where I got my foundation and love for litigation," Tuffs said. "I was always drawn to the courtroom, and when I decided to go into civil practice, I didn't want that to end."

The Philadelphia office is Gfeller Laurie's sixth location, part of a long-term expansion plan for the 12-year-old firm. Laurie said the partners agreed on a three- to five-year strategy to expand Gfeller Laurie's personnel and footprint. It's the result of the firm growing its client business amid the COVID-19 pandemic while stymied on attempts to bring on more talent.

"It was hard to identify opportunities for growth through hiring," Laurie said. "Nobody wanted to make a change until things settled down. In the past 12 months, we have been presented with significant opportunities to hire talent and bring more people into the partnership."

Those opportunities include Tuffs in Philadelphia, along with lateral hires Lisa A. Stefano as a partner in Gfeller Laurie's West Hartford, Connecticut, office and Madison E. Calkins and Donald Cabral as associates in the Princeton, New Jersey, office.

Stefano's practice primarily concentrates on managing insurance coverage, underwriting, and claim and bad faith litigation for insurers. She moves to private practice after more than 20 years as an in-house general counsel for insurance companies including the Hartford and Travelers.

"Her work ethic, base level of knowledge, character and personality all fit in with what we need," Laurie said. "Lisa has done a lot of coverage work in a number of jurisdictions, and we need experienced people to get more work. Lisa fits right into that mold."

Cabral's practice includes sports and recreation litigation, where he has experience representing clients in negotiating sports endorsement contracts and resolving related disputes. A former Olympic track and field athlete in the 2012 and 2016 games, Cabral received his law degree and MBA from the University of Connecticut earlier this year.

Calkins' practice focuses on construction litigation, commercial litigation, professional liability and defense litigation. She received her law degree from Syracuse University College of Law and started her legal career as a law clerk for Judge Thomas J. Walls Jr., in the Mercer County, New Jersey, Superior Court.

--Editing by Steven Edelstone.