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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Rising Star: Berger Montague's Camille Fundora Rodriguez

By **Amanda Ottaway**

Law360 (June 14, 2021, 2:32 PM EDT) -- Camille Fundora Rodriguez of Berger Montague has racked up six and seven-figure settlements on behalf of scores of workers who say they were underpaid, earning her a spot among the employment law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as **Rising Stars**.

THE BIGGEST DEAL OF HER CAREER!

Rodriguez said she's particularly proud of a \$625,000 settlement she helped snag on behalf of a collective of chicken catchers in several Southern states. She worked on the case from beginning to end.

Chicken catching is what it sounds like. Workers manually wrangle and cage live chickens for transport to the slaughterhouse. It's difficult, uncomfortable and dangerous work, Rodriguez said. Cloaked in protective gear and often working in the dark, catchers can only hold four or five fowl per hand, being careful not to kill the birds before they arrive at their final destination, she said.

Lead plaintiffs and catchers Jimmy Nicks and James Earl Patrick sued multiple Koch Foods entities and a staffing company in June 2016, alleging they were paid a "piece rate" for every 1,000 chickens they caught instead of being paid for all the hours they worked, which included some overtime. The collective spans 272 who opted in, according to the settlement agreement.

"There were a lot of moving pieces and issues in that matter," Rodriguez said.

In a collective action, plaintiffs can opt in if they believe they've suffered similar harm. But it's not easy to get those kinds of suits approved, Rodriguez said.

"We have to prove to the court that we're alleging a violation on a policy that was across the nation, so it was across multiple states, across multiple complexes. Even though there was a variety of different third-party catching companies involved, the violations were the same," she said.

The Koch suit didn't settle until 2019.

"I'd say that was the biggest one of my career. That was the one where I was not only the lead associate, but I took a bigger leadership attorney position in that matter from inception to settlement," Rodriguez said.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY!

Rodriguez said she loves getting phone calls from members of a class action who had no idea there was a wage-and-hour lawsuit in the works, much less that it had settled.

"And they call you with questions and are extremely grateful and happy," she said. "And you inform them, you educate them on their rights, so that they know what to do or how to handle — what their rights are going forward. I think that's usually my proudest moment."

She also said she's gotten satisfying calls from class members to say an industry is actually changing its pay practices due to litigation. For example, she said, after her firm and others sued alleging a lack of overtime pay for some oil and gas workers, those companies started coughing it up, Rodriguez said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER!

"Getting that money for everybody!" Rodriguez said. But more seriously she added, "Effectuating change. Making people's lives better, ensuring that they are paid properly for the work that they did. Whether they're high-income earners or low-income earners, what motivates me is just to make sure that they are given what they are owed under the law."

OTHER NOTABLE CASES SHE'S WORKED ON!

Rodriguez has worked on multiple wage cases on behalf of delivery drivers and home health aides in recent years, racking up six- and seven-figure settlements.

Rodriguez also pointed to her role as the firm's first diversity, equity and inclusion coordinator, which she stepped into in February 2020. She helped put



Camille Fundora Rodriguez
Berger Montague

Age: 37

Home base: Philadelphia

Position: Shareholder and the firm's first diversity, equity and inclusion coordinator

Law school: Widener University School of Law

together a two-part virtual training series, which she said she's hoping to reprise this year in person. She also created a task force to help with recruiting and retaining talent, she said.

First job after law school: Worked for a New York City accounting firm

HOW SHE THINKS THE LEGAL INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT DECADE:

Rodriguez pointed to the pandemic and subsequent move to remote work as causing some permanent shifts. Courts are becoming tech-savvy, while some depositions and mediations could take place remotely, she said. She predicted that firms are likely to be more friendly to attorneys working from home or who have family priorities.

"I think firms will be providing more flexible hours for attorneys who have young children or who live in multi-generational households, to attract that talent," she said.

She also emphasized the importance of taking vacation time.

"I think firms will be more conscientious of making sure people do take vacation time," she said.

— As told to Amanda Ottaway

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,400 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2021, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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