

Former SEC Regional Head Joins MoFo In San Francisco

By John Petrick

Law360 (March 13, 2019, 10:50 PM EDT) -- Morrison & Foerster LLP has added to its securities litigation practice a veteran government securities enforcement and compliance attorney who has overseen complex financial fraud cases and led the San Francisco office of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the firm said Wednesday.

Jina Choi joined the firm March 4 as a partner in the San Francisco office, where she will represent companies and executives on such matters as whistleblower complaints, enforcement and compliance matters, as well as government and internal investigations, the firm said.



Jina Choi

Choi worked at the SEC for 16 years, five of which she served as regional director of the San Francisco office, where she led a staff of 130 and oversaw teams of attorneys in investigations involving insider trading, market manipulation, federal securities fraud and Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.

Choi's past experience in public service also includes time as a trial attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and as an assistant U.S. attorney in the Northern District of Texas.

"I've been with the government a long time, so I'm really looking forward to the change," Choi told Law360. "With Morrison & Foerster's client base, I'm looking forward to giving people the perspective I had working for the government, and using it to help people navigate some sticky situations."

She said her decision to become an SEC attorney earlier in her career wasn't quite so deliberate or conventional.

"I've hired a lot of people at the SEC. Attorneys come in and say, 'I always wanted to be an SEC enforcement attorney.' I always found that kind of surprising, because I didn't even know about SEC enforcement attorneys when I was a young lawyer," Choi said, with a laugh. "That generation grew up with Enron, large-scale fraud, and that kind of inspired them when they were in law school. I fell upon it more accidentally."

Choi said she had been a transactional lawyer, had worked in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C., and had "a lot of depositions under my belt."

But when Choi started her long tenure at the SEC, she said, she knew she was making the best use of the skills she had developed up to that point.

"I fell in love with doing investigations. Trying to find out what happened. Getting to the truth. That's more important now than ever," she added. "It was a very natural fit for me."

It's a prestigious organization, she said of the SEC, whose San Francisco staff she is proud to forever have been a part of.

"It was 50 percent examination, and 50 percent enforcement. I came up through the enforcement side. It is really just a group of talented professionals, accountants, attorneys, examiners, who really take the mission of the SEC seriously — investor protection, and making sure we have fair and orderly markets," she said. "It was an honor to be part of that office."

Craig Martin, firmwide managing partner and co-head of the firm's investigations and white collar defense group, said Choi's years as an SEC lawyer and supervisor will be invaluable to Morrison & Foerster clients.

"Jina's insight into the investigation process makes her an exceptional resource to clients in high-stakes matters," Martin said in a statement. "Her unique vantage point on SEC enforcement and regulation will be essential to clients facing a complex enforcement and compliance environment."

Choi, a graduate of Yale Law School and Oberlin College, said compliance and regulatory law in a global economy can seem a bit daunting. But that's why there are lawyers like her around.

"It can seem like a lot. Especially when it comes to crisis management, and you're dealing with different agencies and pressures, and it's about your reputation. Navigating that can be exceptionally challenging," she said. "But the more expertise and counsel that you feel that you have, and feel you can trust in, is really important."

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.