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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2025

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Law Firm Lateral Hiring Expands in 2024, Fueled by Associate Recruitment

NALP released results of its annual *2024 Lateral Hiring Survey* today, available at www.nalp.org/entry-lateral. Following a two-year market downturn, lateral hiring bounced back in 2024, with hiring growing nearly 14% overall and lateral associate hiring rising by almost 25%. Partner lateral hiring increased by a modest 2%, while the hiring of other lateral lawyers, such as staff attorneys and counsel, was flat compared to 2023.

As in previous years, lateral hiring patterns varied across offices, influenced by factors such as firm size and geographic location. For example, during the 2022-2023 downward market, smaller firms appeared to capitalize on the reduction in lateral hiring across larger-sized firms. As the 2024 lateral market picked up, that trend reversed — hiring was down by 11% overall in smaller firms of 250 or fewer lawyers, while it increased the most (+21%) in firms of more than 1,000 lawyers. Although lateral hiring was up by 14% nationally in 2024, the lateral market still experienced a net decline in local markets, such as Boston, Miami, Minneapolis, Nashville, and Seattle.

“Since the onset of the pandemic, the lateral market has seen dramatic swings in hiring. In particular, 2022 and 2023 were characterized by a retreat of BigLaw firms from the marketplace, which created an opportunity for savvy small firms to pick up some top-notch talent. In 2024 the lateral market began to stabilize and with that we saw the BigLaw firms reentering the fray, largely driving the smaller firms out of the market,” said NALP Executive Director Nikia Gray.

NALP’s 2024 analyses include data on nearly 4,300 lateral lawyer hires from 434 U.S.-based offices/firms. Firms were asked to submit as much office-specific information as possible; however, in some cases, firms could only provide firm-wide or multi-office data.

Key Insights:

- Total lateral hiring volume increased by 14% compared with 2023 in the offices/firms responding to the survey, with a median of 4.0 lateral hires and an average of 9.9 hires per office/firm. Despite an increase in the average number of lateral hires from 9.3 in 2023, both the average and median number of hires remain below recent trends from 2012-22.
- The average number of lateral associates hired in 2024 was 5.8 and the median was two, compared to an average of 2.2 and a median of one for lateral partner hires. Lateral associate hiring accounted for 59% of all lateral hiring in 2024 (up from 55% in 2023) and lateral partner hiring accounted for 23% (down slightly from 24%). Other hiring comprised 19% of all 2024 lateral hiring.
- This year's overall growth in lateral hiring is primarily attributed to the large influx of lateral associate hires, which increased by 25%. Lateral partner hiring also rose in 2024, albeit with a much smaller increase of about 2%.
- Changes in lateral hiring varied by firm size. For example, lateral associate hiring experienced a significant increase within firms of 1,001+ lawyers, up 41%; whereas lateral hiring in firms of 250 or fewer lawyers declined across all lawyer categories this year, with a 15% decrease in lateral partner hiring and 13% decrease in lateral associate hiring. In contrast, lateral hiring was up across all lawyer categories in firms of 251-1,000 lawyers.
- Average figures varied widely across local markets. For example, the average number of hires by city ranged from 1.2 to 8.2 for lateral associates and 0.1 to 3.8 for lateral partners, with New York City at the top of both ranges.
- Among cities reporting at least 40 lateral hires in 2024, the percentage change in overall lateral hiring from 2023 ranged from a decline of 23% in Boston to an increase of 38% in the Denver area.
- New to this year's survey, NALP asked offices about their post-clerkship associate hiring. These figures are reported separately from all other lateral hiring. Overall, an average of 0.8 post-clerkship hires were reported per office/firm.
- The survey also included items related to lateral lawyer hires from outside of the firm's geographic areas who were granted the flexibility to work remotely without relocating. Despite increased activity in the lateral hiring market, fully remote lateral hires remain rare. Out of 210 firms/offices hiring lateral partners in 2024, 12.4% hired lateral partners who did not need to relocate – less than half a percentage point higher than in 2023 (12%). Fully remote hires were even less likely to

be reported among associates. Of the 341 firms/offices hiring lateral associates in 2024, 7% hired lateral associates who did not need to relocate – continuing a downward trend from 2023 (13.6%) and 2022 (19.3%).

- For the first time this year, NALP also asked offices about their general policies regarding lateral remote hires, regardless of whether or not they hired any remote laterals in 2024. Over half (51%) of the offices reported that their office policy excludes the hiring of any fully remote lateral hires. About 35% of offices considered fully remote lateral partner hires, of which 13.6% of offices had contingencies upon candidates' location being in a geographic area where the firm did not have a physical office. The remaining 21.7% considered fully remote lateral partner hires regardless of the individual's location. And 33% of offices considered fully remote lateral associate hires – 14.3% of offices having contingencies upon candidates' location being in a geographic area where the firm did not have a physical office and 18.6% of offices hiring fully remote hires regardless of candidates' location.

Read NALP's full analysis on the 2024 lateral hiring market at www.nalp.org/entry-lateral. To request an interview, contact <mailto:media@nalp.org>.

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About NALP

NALP is an association of more than 3,000 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and ethical principles for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 50 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information, contact NALP at info@nalp.org or call (202) 835-1001.