

## DOJ Civil Rights Appellate Leader Joins Crowell & Moring

By Jack Rodgers

*Law360 (May 8, 2025, 3:09 PM EDT)* -- Crowell & Moring LLP hired the acting deputy chief of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division's Appellate Section as a senior counsel who will be based in Washington focusing on a range of higher education matters, the firm announced Thursday.

Elizabeth Hecker is bringing to Crowell & Moring more than two decades of experience in senior legal roles at the U.S. Department of Justice, including a focus on appeals and representing the government in state and federal courts. Most of her work at the Justice Department revolved around equal education law, as well as working with Title VI and Title IX matters and state anti-discrimination laws, the firm highlighted in a statement.



Elizabeth Hecker

Hecker was part of the Justice Department team that urged the U.S. Supreme Court in 2021 to find Harvard University and the University of North Carolina's affirmative action policies constitutional. The justices said in a 6-3 vote two years later the policies ignored the 14th Amendment.

At Crowell & Moring, she will continue to work on education litigation and focus on defending clients against enforcement actions, as well as investigations into universities, according to the statement.

In an email to Law360 Pulse Thursday, Hecker said it was a privilege to support Harvard and UNC in defense of their admission programs.

"Of course, everyone knew there was a good chance the court would overturn its precedent allowing for race-conscious admissions, but we agreed with the universities on the educational value of having student bodies with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints," she wrote.

Legal action against universities have come into the national spotlight, with the Trump administration freezing some \$2.2 billion in federal funding from Harvard after saying it failed to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In response, the university sued the administration last month.

Crowell & Moring said Hecker will counsel clients on changes in regulations related diversity, equity and inclusion issues, as well as gender-related programs. She will also advise companies on First Amendment issues, federalism and constitutional matters, the firm added.

That work is becoming increasingly important, as the government continues looking at higher education institutions and their implementation of anti-discrimination laws, Hecker said, making it critical for

clients to understand those federal statutes.

Hecker also told Law360 Pulse that working in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division "was the honor of a lifetime," and she lauded her colleagues as "dedicated public servants who worked tirelessly" to enforce civil rights laws.

"But after over 17 years at DOJ, it was time for me to pursue other opportunities, and in Crowell, I found the perfect fit," she said. "Crowell's top-notch litigation practice — and particularly its stand-out experience representing colleges and universities and its remarkable appellate practice — was a big draw."

Hecker, a Georgetown University Law Center graduate, spent nearly four years in private practice before starting on the path of public service. She joined the Civil Rights Division in 2008 as a trial attorney in its Housing and Civil Enforcement Section, her LinkedIn page showed.

After about five years in that role, Hecker clerked in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, before returning to the DOJ as a senior counsel in its Office of Legal Policy. She then rejoined the Civil Rights Division a year and a half later as a senior attorney in its Appellate Section.

In that role, Hecker represented the government as it argued before the Fourth Circuit in 2021 that a Black restaurant worker was owed nearly \$550,000 in restitution after his white ex-boss effectively enslaved him, forcing the man to work more than 100 hours a week for five years, without pay or time off.

Hecker also represented the government in a matter involving discriminatory arrests by a former sheriff in Arizona who ran for the U.S. Senate.

A Ninth Circuit panel in 2018 agreed with the Justice Department's argument that then-sheriff Joe Arpaio's disproportionate arrest of Latinos amounted to racial discrimination, and that since he was the chief law officer, the Maricopa County Sheriff Office as a whole had violated the Constitution.

The county tried to avoid responsibility for Arpaio's actions, but the Ninth Circuit agreed with the Justice Department's argument that the county was liable.

In June 2021, Hecker was tapped as a special litigation counsel in the Civil Rights Division's Appellate Section, then in 2025, stepped into her most-recent role as its acting deputy chief.

During her nearly decade-long tenure in the section, she filed more than 50 briefs in federal courts of appeals, and as special litigation counsel, helped supervise some 15 staff attorneys and advised trial-level litigating attorneys, Crowell & Moring noted.

Hecker received a number of awards throughout her federal service, including multiple special achievement and meritorious awards. She was recognized with three Department of Justice Distinguished Service Awards and two special commendations, the firm said.

She has taught at the George Washington University Law School since 2018, according to her LinkedIn profile.

Kent Goss, co-chair of Crowell & Moring's litigation group, said in the firm's statement that Hecker "is a

perfect fit for our higher education clients."

"She has been living in this space for decades, knows the statutes and their requirements, and is uniquely qualified to assist clients, particularly at this time," Goss said in a statement. "She will also bring her diverse and impressive experience as an appellate writer and advocate to advise and work on appeals across the firm."

--Additional reporting by Chris Villani, Joyce Hanson and Lauren Berg. Editing by Covey Son.

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