



Sang-yul Lee

Partner

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OVERVIEW

Sang-yul Lee is a partner in the firm's Labor, Employment, and Workplace Safety practice. He has a broad-based practice and represents clients in both litigation and transaction matters. He advises clients on all aspects of labor and employment law and human resources issues.

Sang-yul has represented clients in non-compete matters, EEO litigation, collective bargaining, organizing campaigns, strikes, arbitrations, layoffs and closures, health and safety investigations, wage and hour audits and collective actions, and union pension/welfare audits. He represents clients before federal and state courts, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the US Department of Labor, and the US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, as well as numerous other governmental agencies, in matters arising under a wide range of federal and state labor laws. He also has extensive experience representing parties in employment, separation/severance, change-in-control, independent contractor and restrictive covenant agreements.

Sang-yul has first chair experience in bench and jury trials as well as numerous administrative agency trials and hearings. He has served as primary labor and employment counsel on dozens of M&A transactions and restructuring matters. Additionally, over the years, he has represented numerous international clients in their litigation, labor and employment, and transactional needs in the United States. He also has the unique experience of having been both the NLRB government agency lawyer, as well as management-side attorney in over 40 federal labor board election petitions and/or contested elections to certify and/or decertify labor organizations (unions). He has negotiated or advised on first time and successor collective bargaining agreements with most of the major labor unions in the country.

Sang-yul has been primary labor and benefits counsel on numerous hotel acquisition, redevelopment and restructuring matters throughout the country. He also has represented hotel owners and managers in investigations by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and state agencies and offices of the Attorney General in privacy, data breach and credit card laundering cases.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Prior to joining the firm, Sang-yul was a partner in the Chicago office of a national law firm.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Recognized by *The Best Lawyers in America*® for Employment Law - Management in Chicago, IL, 2020-2026
- Named to the *Lawdragon 500* Leading US Corporate Employment Lawyers Guide, 2020-2025
- Named a Notable Leader in Employment & Labor Law by *Crain's Chicago Business*, 2023
- Elected as a Fellow to the *College of Labor and Employment Lawyers*, 2020
- Named to the Lawyers of Color's Inaugural "Nation's Best" list, 2019
- Named a Leading Lawyer for Labor & Employment and International Transactions work in the *Leading Lawyers Network*, 2011 to present
- Named to the "40 Illinois Attorneys Under Forty to Watch," by *Law Bulletin Publishing*, 2007
- Named to the Illinois Rising Stars list, 2008
- Named to the *National Asian Pacific American Bar Association's* "Best Lawyers Under 40" list, 2006

PROFESSIONAL / CIVIC ACTIVITIES

- Faculty, Practising Law Institute (Hotels: Acquiring, Managing, Developing & Converting the Hot Property)
- Labor and Employment Law Section, American Bar Association (ABA)
- Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA-Chicago Chapter)
- Employment and Industrial Relations Law Committee, International Bar Association (IBA)
- President, Chicago Bar Foundation (2024-2025)
- Overseas Board of Governors, International Association of Korean Lawyers
- Chair, Advisory Board of the Northwestern University Asian American Alumni Association
- Past President, Board of Directors, National Asian Pacific American Bar Association Foundation
- Past Secretary and Board Director, Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms
- Board of Directors, Japan America Society of Chicago

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- "Committee on Practice & Procedure Under the NLRA Midwinter Meeting: Legal Standards and Procedures Applicable to Recusal of NLRB Members," ABA Labor and Employment Law Section, 4 March 2021

EDUCATION

- B.A., Northwestern University
- J.D., University of Illinois College of Law
- A.M., University of Illinois School of Labor and Employment Relations

ADMISSIONS

- Bar of Illinois
- United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois
- United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois

LANGUAGES

- Korean

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP *POWERED BY HUB*

- 5 January 2026, Illinois Employment Law Update for 2026
- 20 December 2023, A Last Minute, Temporary Reprieve for Chicago Employers: Chicago Amends Paid Sick Leave Ordinance
- 30 November 2023, Chicago Employers: Prepare For New Paid Leave Ordinance Effective 31 December 2023
- 20 April 2023, Biometric Claims by Workers Covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements are Preempted in Illinois
- 15 March 2023, Illinois Guarantees One Week of Paid Leave for All Workers
- September 2022, Global Update: Navigating Key Labor and Employment Law Developments in the U.S., Middle East, and Australia
- 21 February 2022, Illinois Employment Law Developments
- 17 February 2022, Student Athletes No More, NLRB Reinstates Scope of NLRA Section 7 to Include "Players at Academic Institutions"
- October 2021, Business as Usual or Unusual – Return to Work Challenges and Strategies for Employers
- April 2021, April 2021 Accolades
- 20 April 2020, COVID-19: Another Warning from the U.S. Antitrust Agencies – Anticompetitive Conduct in Labor Markets Risks Criminal and/or Civil Liability

- 2 March 2020, The National Labor Relations Board Issues Second in Trio of Agency Rules to Clarify Its Joint Employer Standard
- 27 January 2020, Competition in U.S. Labor Markets: Non-Compete Clauses Increasingly Under Fire
- 30 June 2017, Cook County, Illinois and the City of Chicago Mandate New Paid Sick Leave Benefits
- 21 April 2017, Seventh Circuit Finds Sexual Orientation Protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- [“Chicago Expands Paid Sick Leave Ordinance to Mandate Additional Paid General Leave for Employees,”](#) *Employee Benefit Plan Review*, June 2024
- [“Illinois Supreme Court: Biometric Claims by Union Workers Covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements Are Not Immune from Federal Labor Law Preemption,”](#) *Employee Relations Law Journal*, September 2023

NEWS & EVENTS

- 28 August 2025, K&L Gates Advises South Korea's GS Engineering & Construction on US\$1.2 Billion Sale of Water Treatment Subsidiary to UAE's TAQA
- 7 November 2024 - 10 November 2024, 2024 NAPABA Convention, Hosted by National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
- 18 August 2022, More Than 350 K&L Gates Lawyers Named Among 2023 Best Lawyers in America, Ones to Watch
- 19 August 2021, Nearly 300 K&L Gates Lawyers Named Among 2022 Best Lawyers in America, Ones to Watch
- 4 October 2019, K&L Gates, Numerous Lawyers Honored for Diversity, Legal Leadership
- 10 July 2019, Three K&L Gates Partners Named to Lawyers of Color's Inaugural “Nation's Best” List
- 3 August 2018, K&L Gates Advises innogy on Acquisition of More Than 2,000 MW Onshore Wind Projects
- 17 May 2016, K&L Gates Adds Labor & Employment, Litigation Partner in Chicago

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Labor, Employment, and Workplace Safety
- Benefits and ESOPs
- Biometric Data Compliance and Defense
- Collective Labor and Works Councils

- Commercial Disputes
- Data Protection, Privacy, and Security
- Employment Disputes
- Employment Investigations
- Employment Issues in Business Transactions
- Executive Compensation
- Human Resource Advice and Compliance
- Internal Investigations
- Mergers and Acquisitions
- Oil and Gas
- Renewables
- Restructuring and Insolvency
- Wage and Hour
- Workplace Safety

INDUSTRIES

- Consumer Goods and Services
- Life Sciences
- Resort, Hospitality, and Leisure