

Jillian Dunbar: Dedicated working mom and office leader at Phillips Lytle LLP

■ BENNETT LOUDON

Jillian M. Dunbar has had a smooth transition into her new role as Rochester office leader for Phillips Lytle LLP.

Dunbar, a partner with the firm, took over the leadership role in the spring, succeeding Kevin J. Mulvehill, who had led the office since 2020.

Mulvehill now leads the firm's labor and employment law team and serves on the firm's governing committee.

He described Dunbar as "highly intelligent, highly organized," and "a great leader."

Victoria Grady, Dunbar's mentor at the firm, described her as "extremely diligent and thoughtful and very dedicated to getting the job, and the transaction, done."

"She really enjoys digging into those meatier legal issues in getting a resolution for the client," Grady said.

In addition to overseeing local operations, Dunbar will lead the firm's regional expansion efforts. She is expected to advise the managing partner and governing committee on opportunities to grow regionally by recruiting boutique law firms and specialty practices to join the firm.

Dunbar's legal practice is focused on diverse and complex commercial lending transactions, with a special focus on affordable housing and community development deals, middle-market lending, and transactions involving federal and state low-income housing tax credits, historic tax credits and brown-field tax credits.



Jillian Dunbar, a partner at Phillips Lytle, poses for a portrait in their office in Rochester, NY on Tuesday, June 19, 2024. (Photo by Lauren Petracca)

She serves on the board of directors at the YWCA of Rochester & Monroe County as well as the Cheers for Children Planning Committee for Bivona Child Advocacy Center.

"I think it's been going really well so far. Luckily, right before me I had two great office leaders and they were able to kind of get me up to speed really quickly," she said.

Dunbar said her tenure at the firm illustrates the organization's dedication to professional development and supportive management.

"I think for me personally there is significance to the fact that I am a woman and that also that I'm a mother to two young kids," she said.

"I think it's a great example to show associates that the firm values women and working mothers and is supportive of them," she said.

Dunbar worked part time until recently to devote more time to her two children, but she still became

a partner and is now Rochester office leader.

“For me, the significance is showing women that you can excel in your career while also knowing that the firm is supportive,” she said.

“I don’t like to pretend that it’s easy. That was why I went part-time for a while when my kids were babies. The firm was extraordinarily supportive and was making sure that I felt that I could actually work part time and not have it derail my career in any sort of way,” she said.

And in her new role Dunbar plans to be “more vocal about that and encourage women to do what they need to do and know that it won’t derail their career.”

“When we recognize talent, we’re more than willing to accommodate individual schedules and offer them flexibility so they can maintain and grow their practice,” Mulvehill said.

“It would be incredibly difficult to replace Jillian at her level of talent, intelligence, and effectiveness as an attorney. It would make little or no sense not to grant her that flexibility,” he said.

Dunbar said her management style is collaborative.

“When I’m in a management position I like to be cognizant of the fact that whatever idea I have, just because I have it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s the right, or the best idea,” she said.

Dunbar’s choice of career was no surprise to her parents who she always “debated” as a child.

Her mentor as an undergraduate at Syracuse University advised the law office intern to make sure she liked the practice of law.

“His reasoning being it’s a lot of money to spend and a lot of time if you don’t know if you’re actually going to enjoy the career,” Dunbar said.

She interned with the Monroe County District Attorney’s office and also a law firm in Syracuse.



Jillian Dunbar, a partner at Phillips Lytle, poses for a portrait in their office in Rochester, NY on Tuesday, June 19, 2024. (Photo by Lauren Petracca)

“I really ended up enjoying both experiences, so it solidified the idea that I wanted to go to law school,” Dunbar said.

She eventually “fell into” her practice area.

“I do banking work. The field that I focus on is financing for affordable housing. We represent lenders who make loans to developers who build affordable housing using various types of tax credits,” she said.

Earlier in her career Dunbar worked at a law firm in Boston where she

worked in various practice areas and especially enjoyed the real estate and finance group.

When she decided to move back to Rochester she interviewed with different firms. Phillips Lytle, where she has worked since September 2013, appealed to her because of the sophisticated work they do.

“And I liked the idea that, at the end of the day, the product of my work is affordable houses for citizens in our community,” she said.

Jillian M. Dunbar

Title: Rochester office leader, Phillips Lytle LLP

Residence: Webster

Age: 36

Family: Husband, Brian Dunbar; daughters Charlie, 4, and Hannah, 2

Education: Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, bachelor’s degree in policy studies and economics (double major), 2009; William and Mary Law School, juris doctor, 2013.

Quote: “I don’t like to pretend that it’s easy. That was why I went part-time for a while when my kids were babies. The firm was extraordinarily supportive and was making sure that I felt that I could actually work part time and not have it derail my career in any sort of way.”