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Barnes & Thornburg Recruits 12-Lawyer K&L Gates Healthcare Team

By Amanda O'Brien

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What You Need to Know

- Barnes & Thornburg has added a seven-partner healthcare team from K&L Gates in Raleigh, building on an aggressive lateral hiring strategy this year.
- Firm leaders noted that Barnes & Thornburg has added over 71 partners since the start of 2026, as the firm continues to lift out group hires from competitors.

Continuing its aggressive lateral growth strategy, Barnes & Thornburg has added a seven-partner healthcare team from K&L Gates in Raleigh, North Carolina, including partners Kelsey Jernigan and John Lawrence.

Overall, the lateral group to Barnes & Thornburg includes 12 lawyers, including 10 who are following Jernigan and Lawrence. They include partners Jared Burtner, Nathan Huff, Carolyn Merritt, McNair Nichols and Rebecca Schaefer and associates Christian Flemming and Michael Phillips, the firm said Wednesday.

Lawrence has been appointed managing partner of Barnes & Thornburg's Raleigh office, and Jernigan has also been appointed director of healthcare regulatory services.

Courtesy photos

John H. Lawrence (L) and Kelsey U. Jernigan (R) of Barnes & Thornburg.

"We were incredibly impressed with the growth of Barnes & Thornburg's healthcare group over the last four years," Lawrence said in an interview. "Our areas of expertise are very similar, but we also bring additional areas as well so we can help create a really comprehensive group, and we're so excited about what that will look like."

According to firm managing partner Andrew Detherage and healthcare industry practice chair John Kelly, Barnes & Thornburg made growing its healthcare practice a strategic tenet beginning when Kelly first joined the firm back in 2022.

"When Andy and I met years ago, the vision he had for the healthcare practice was to shift it to an industry practice focus. It makes sense in this environment we live in today and the needs of our clients," Kelly said. "Now we have almost 140 lawyers in the healthcare industry practice that can service nearly every need a healthcare client has. We thought it would take five years to get there, and it took slightly less than that."

Beyond the healthcare group, Barnes & Thornburg has been on a hiring tear throughout 2026. Most recently, the firm added a five-partner tax controversy and insurance recovery group from Bradley Arant Boult Cummings in April; the entirety of Lowenstein Sandler›s insurance recovery group, including practice co-chair Lynda Bennett, also in April; and, in the firm's largest group move to date this year, Barnes & Thornburg onboarded a total of 39 public finance lawyers from Ballard Spahr in February.

In total, Detherage estimated the firm has hired over 70 lateral partners and more than 130 attorneys overall this year, describing 2026 as "an extraordinary year" for the firm. He added that the firm's growth strategy was opportunistic and hinted at further growth throughout the rest of 2026.

"We've kind of blown up our budget in many respects because we added 71 partners and a good number of other lawyers. We're doing really well, we're ahead of forecast, and we have every reason to believe we're going to finish really strong this year, which is extraordinary given how many people we've brought on," he said, spotlighting Barnes & Thornburg's integration team and newly appointed chief onboarding and integration officer Emily Landry as key to the firm's success with lateral additions.

"Emily transitioned in because a C-suite leader retired earlier this year. She has not only transitioned in, she has been extraordinary," Detherage said. "Our C-suite and teams get involved in every one of these integrations ... by the time [these hires] get here we have a team ready to get them transitioned in and then our team stays with everyone over a two-year period. It's been a successful approach for us."

Given the firm's success in hiring, Detherage continued, Barnes & Thornburg had to create an updated budget to account for its unprecedented lateral growth. While there's typically some lag time in collections when a new hire joins a firm, Detherage said, the firm's hires have "hit the ground running".

"I don't know if you'd asked me in April or May where we'd be by the end of July if I would have expected us to be where we are," Detherage said. "We feel really good about it and we expect that to pay off next year for all of us."

In response to a request for comment, K&L Gates global managing partner Stacy Ackermann said "K&L Gates continues to maintain a premier healthcare practice with a longstanding presence in the Carolinas, enhanced by the depth and reach of our national and global platform...We remain focused on our clients and the continued strategic growth of our firm."