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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

Bentham adds John Harabedian to Los Angeles team

By America Hernandez

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City councilman and Los Angeles county prosecutor John C. Harabedian is joining litigation finance company Bentham IMF, after turning down an offer from the U.S. Attorney's office.

"I'm going to join an all-star team of attorneys pioneering the industry of helping bring justice to everyday people that otherwise wouldn't get it, which is very fulfilling," said Harabedian, who leaves the Los Angeles County district attorney's office for his new position.

The announcement comes on the heels of Bentham's pledge to donate \$300,000 to the Civil Justice Research Institute at the UC Irvine School of Law.

Harabedian's framing of trial funding as an access to justice initiative is in stark contrast with the industry's critics, who see large-scale investment in civil suits as flooding the court system with capital and encouraging litigation arms races, usually between corporations.

Allison K. Chock, a senior invest-

ment manager who heads Bentham's Los Angeles office, said that trial funding's reputation as a "money-grubbing operation" is misguided.

"If a client really has a \$100 million case but has to settle for something far below that because without us they can't afford to litigate it, is that really justice?" she asked. "The fact that we're able to grab a civic-minded lawyer like John who cares about giving back and lure him away from an amazing career as an AUSA, which is really a brass ring for a lot of folks, means we're doing something right in making a difference in the civil justice system."

Bentham now has seven attorneys in Los Angeles and San Francisco, four of whom used to work for Latham & Watkins LLP.

The hire reflects an uptick in business in the last six to nine months, which Chock said has been fueled by larger, established law firms finding room for outside investment in their business models, as opposed to the more traditional role funding has played in allowing smaller boutiques to take on expensive cases.

Harabedian spent four years as an associate handling securities litigation at Latham in Los Angeles, while

he also served as mayor of the city of Sierra Madre from 2014 to 2015. Currently he is a member of the city council.

He left private practice to join the district attorney's office, litigating misdemeanors and handling felony preliminary hearings for a year.

When the time came for his next move, the councilman said he was attracted to Bentham's mission of allowing cases to be judged on the merits as the next generation of legal justice.

He compared the work of a government prosecutor charging criminals to his new role identifying civil lawsuits likely to win high-dollar verdicts.

"Litigation funding fundamentally provides court access to a larger section of society, and Bentham specifically looks to help individuals who have been wronged, victims," Harabedian said. "It's really a natural progression in public service, and I don't know that what I'm doing at the L.A. District Attorney's office now or what I would be doing in the U.S. Attorney's office would be much different."

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