

Rising Star: Robins Kaplan's William Reiss

By Erin Coe

Law360, San Diego (April 29, 2016, 2:45 PM ET) -- For the last several years, antitrust litigator William Reiss has helped represent a class of plaintiffs in multidistrict litigation alleging automotive parts makers engaged in one of the largest price-fixing schemes ever and has secured hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements, earning him a spot among Law360's top competition attorneys under 40.

Reiss, a 39-year-old principal in Robins Kaplan LLP's New York office who made Law360's Rising Stars list, has devoted much of his time since 2012 as part of the co-lead counsel team representing a class of end-payor plaintiffs in the automotive parts MDL in the Eastern District of Michigan. The case is massive in its size and complexity — with 35 separate sets of cases against about 150 defendants and the cases each involve different auto parts, alleged conspirators and timelines.

The civil litigation runs parallel to the U.S. Department of Justice's ongoing criminal case that claims the scheme is the largest global antitrust conspiracy on record and that the international cartel's misconduct affected more than \$5 billion in auto parts sold to U.S. car makers.

So far, Reiss has helped recover about \$225 million in settlements for the class of plaintiffs that claim they purchased or leased new cars at inflated prices as a result of price fixing and other collusive conduct among auto parts makers. He served as the main drafter of the first settlement agreement in the litigation with Nippon Seiki Co. Ltd. for \$4.56 million in December 2013.

"We are proud of the total settlement amount so far and believe we can secure significantly more," he said.

He said the case has been one of the most challenging of his career, in part because of the sheer number of parties and attorneys involved in the litigation.

"Here, you are not just thinking about the claims of your clients and the challenges of the defendants," he said. "There are a lot of strategic choices that could affect your clients as well as other clients. Even if

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William Reiss
Robins Kaplan

you have the same end-game for clients to make the defendants pay, you have to coordinate with other plaintiffs and a lot of factors go into that.”

Being one of the lawyers at the forefront of coordinating with plaintiffs groups on a case of this scope has been an exciting process, he said.

“Working on such a high-stakes case and litigating against some of the top defense firms in the country is a thrill and really intellectually challenging,” he said.

While Reiss focuses on representing plaintiffs in class actions, he began his legal career on the defense side. After graduating from New York University School of Law in 2001, he worked at Latham & Watkins LLP, where he was assigned to defend AutoZone Inc. in a price discrimination suit in the Eastern District of New York brought by auto parts sellers against retailers. A representative number of plaintiffs proceeded to trial, which led to a jury verdict in the defendants' favor in 2003.

“The case involved Robinson-Patman claims, which are not frequently litigated, but it went all the way to trial,” he said. “I was very junior, but I got an opportunity to work on a case from start to finish ... and when it was over, I had developed a body of knowledge and expertise in antitrust law.”

After four years at Latham, he moved on to Sidley Austin LLP for about three years. And then he switched over to the plaintiffs side, where he worked for Labaton Sucharow LLP for nearly five years and then left with a group of five attorneys to join Robins Kaplan in 2013. He became a principal of the firm in January.

“The defense side is strategic and intellectual, but it’s more reactive,” he said. “On the plaintiffs side, you are crafting the case. You are creating the theories and being aggressive and looking at how to move the case along. It’s something that appealed to me and something that I still enjoy doing.”

While it can sometimes be difficult for aspiring litigators to move beyond doing document review work to writing briefs and making arguments, Reiss said younger attorneys should take advantage of handling pro bono cases and be in constant communication with their supervisor about getting the experience they want.

“Make the most of your opportunities,” he said. “And once you get an opportunity, knock it out of the ballpark.”

--Editing by Emily Kokoll.
