

NEWS

Wiggin Immigration Attorney Brings Personal Experience as New Partner

By Michael Marciano

Connecticut's Wiggin and Dana recently broadened its leadership team with the promotion of Pakistani-American business immigration attorney and recent new mother Najia Khalid to partner.

A former associate at Wormser, Kiely, Galef & Jacobs in New York City, Khalid received the good news toward the end of last year while out on maternity leave. The move became effective in January.

With immigration policy in the national spotlight, Khalid said the specialty is "an immensely personal issue" for her, having gone through the process herself, becoming an American citizen and attorney in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

She said work-life balance "is one of many reasons" she eventually made the move from New York City to Connecticut to join Wiggin and Dana's business immigration team in 2012. "I decided I wanted to be a mother and a law firm partner pretty much last year," she said. "Since then, everything has been on

my side. I'm on point now."

Before the 2008 recession, Khalid said, she and other young associates typically envisioned an eight- to 10-year track to partner, but now many are seeing the timeline extended to 13 or 15 years. She said she feels fortunate to have made it under the wire. Making the move from a boutique Manhattan firm to a midsize New Haven flagship offered greater opportunity to achieve her goals, and to be afforded a more flexible work-life balance.

"In New York City, I was at a predominantly traditional firm, where partners



Najia Khalid and husband Wasif Khalid with their newborn daughter Zarin Amal Sheikh Khalid, last October.

were generally older-generation white males,” Khalid said. “My firm didn’t have paid maternity leave, and a lot of employers still don’t have that. I was looking at Wiggin, and they have 12 weeks paid maternity leave. It’s a big deal. One of the reasons you leave New York is the ability to move and have other opportunities for family life and the personal aspect of life, which is part of my culture.”

Born in England to a Pakistani engineer who came to the United States on a work visa, Khalid and extended family members have firsthand experience with immigration.

“A lot of people think it’s just filling out a form and you just do it if you have the option, but there’s a lot of cost and a lot of time involved,” she said. “The regulations have not changed, but back in the day, enforcement was not so much of an issue. The scrutiny level was different. Post-9/11 there are a lot more vetting processes.”

Married in 2010, Khalid and her husband, banker Wasif Khalid, had receptions in the United States and Pakistan to accommodate relatives.

With President Donald Trump’s administration mired in conflict with political opponents over U.S. immigration law, Khalid said she maintains confidence in the overall system. “We have checks and

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balances,” she said. “You’re not just supposed to be able to change things overnight.”

Khalid also acknowledged that the rights of Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals designees are just what the titles suggest—temporary, and applicants must be aware of the many hurdles that can complicate dreams of citizenship.

“Immigration is discretionary. Immigration officers have complete discretion. So if they are confused or don’t understand something—or if they’re in a bad mood that day—a case can go very differently,” she said.

Khalid said that, even if she is confident she has “a slam-dunk case,”

she tells clients that their chances are 50-50. “You just can’t guarantee immigration,” she said. Beyond that, work eligibility is not extended to immigration status, Khalid stressed, so civil penalties remain in place for violators. “You can’t take it for granted. You are still breaking the law,” she said.

Khalid said she is passionate about helping clients with processes they may not understand, including everyday tasks: from obtaining a driver’s license or enrolling in school to purchasing a home or starting a business. She also represents national and multinational employers, schools and religious institutions and reviews mergers and acquisitions. The most rewarding work, Khalid said, is “helping people obtain the ability to legally work and secure their livelihood.”

Khalid is a frequent speaker who shares her experience as a Muslim and Pakistani attorney, and she mentors women and young mothers. She co-chairs Wiggin and Dana’s diversity committee and is often conducting outreach at nearby colleges. ■

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