

Skadden Lands EDNY Prosecutor From R. Kelly Trial

By Patrick Smith

Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom has hired Maria Cruz Melendez, who most recently served as deputy chief of the civil rights section at the Eastern District of New York U.S. Attorney's office.

As a federal prosecutor, Cruz Melendez worked a variety of higher-profile cases, including the conviction last year of R. Kelly on racketeering and sex trafficking charges. She also prosecuted multiple cases against La Cosa Nostra, specifically the Lucchese and Bonanno families.

Cruz Melendez, once a Skadden associate before joining the prosecutor's office in 2012, is rejoining the firm as a partner in its government

enforcement and white-collar group.

She said she was proud of the work that she had done at EDNY and that any decision to leave after 10 years would "have to be the right fit."

"I have colleagues here (at Skadden) that I count as close friends to this day," Cruz Melendez said in an interview. "That is a testament to its culture."

Cruz Melendez said she expects the demand for white-collar defense lawyers to continue to be high. "I think as a general matter, we are going to see more regulation," she said. "Both from the government and from the public." Social media, she added, has given a stronger voice to the public and incentivized entities to be more transparent.

"Government agencies are starting to look at things that



Photo: Ryland West/ALM

they previously might have not. Companies will need outside counsel to deal with government regulations as well as issues like harassment claims or diversity, equity and inclusion regulations," she said.

David Meister, head of Skadden's government enforcement and white-collar crime group in New York, said in a statement that she has "distinguished herself as a creative and tenacious advocate who engenders the confidence of clients and colleagues."