

Rising Star: Skadden's Mary E. Grinman

By Kellie Mejdrich

Law360 (August 7, 2025, 4:00 PM EDT) -- Mary E. Grinman of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP has defended several large employers in proposed class actions alleging retirement plan mismanagement, including Liberty Mutual and JPMorgan, earning her a spot among benefits practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

Why she's a benefits attorney:

Grinman said she fell into litigation involving the Employee Retirement Income Security Act "by accident — but boy, am I glad I found it."

Among the things Grinman enjoys about the practice are its "people-focused" nature and that attorneys have to craft a narrative about how a company managed its benefits plan over time, given the six-year statute of limitations under ERISA.

"The crux of the issue is, what did the employer do to monitor the strength of its retirement plan offering for its employees? And so that's a great feature of ERISA litigation because it really lets you tell a story," Grinman said.

"That means you have to talk to a lot of people to really figure out how best to present" what a benefits or investment committee did over that time period, she said.

Grinman added that she likes that federal benefits law is constantly developing.

"It's a big area of focus with the appellate courts and the Supreme Court, so there's a lot of room for new, creative legal arguments," Grinman said.

Biggest case she's worked on:

Grinman said defending Liberty Mutual Group Inc. against a class action alleging retirement plan mismanagement via a challenge to

2025



Mary E. Grinman
Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom

Age: 34

Home base: Boston

Position: Counsel

Law school: Harvard Law School

First job after law school: Associate at Skadden

retirement plan fees and investments has been "probably both the biggest and most interesting case I've worked on."

"I've been involved since the beginning," with the case first filed in 2020, she said, and her work with the company stretches back to 2018.

She said there's a personal aspect to the case: Liberty Mutual is a significant driver of employment around Boston, and she walks by its offices on the way to work. Her belief in the company's retirement plan management makes the case "challenging in a good way, because I'm defending a lot of really important people who are from my community," Grinman said.

What motivates her:

Grinman said she loves the team aspect of being a lawyer and that she's always been a fan of group projects.

"You don't want to let the people on your team down, and that's what's always motivated me," Grinman said.

"I also just think it's an incredibly interesting area ... I'm very fortunate that I get to come into work and use my brain every day," she said. She gave the example of expert work on benefits litigation as a "critically important" aspect of the job she's gotten to focus on in the practice.

How she thinks her practice will change in the next 10 years:

Grinman said she's interested to see whether, over the next few years, courts will embrace new procedures in ERISA litigation — a topic of discussion among U.S. Supreme Court justices in the recent decision reviving retirement mismanagement allegations against Cornell University.

Grinman is particularly focused on whether more courts will begin to use Rule 7(a)(7) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure in ERISA cases, which lets judges require plaintiffs to plead, in a brief replying to a defendant's answer, that a prohibited transaction exemption does not apply.

Rule 7(a) proceedings were among several procedural safeguards discussed by justices as potential ways to head off an expected avalanche of ERISA class actions following the high court's decision to restart litigation in the Cornell case. The procedure was discussed in both the main opinion, written by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and in a concurrence by Justice Samuel Alito that was co-signed by Justices Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh.

"I think it's largely been used in qualified immunity cases so far, but I think ERISA is a really good candidate for expansion of the rule," Grinman said.

Looking further out to the next decade, Grinman said, "I think the practice is going to change a lot as a result of the recent expansion of private equity into the retirement space," with the move likely to affect litigation trends in particular.

Her proudest moment as an attorney:

Grinman, who immigrated to the U.S. from Russia at age 2 with her parents, said she's mostly just "proud of being an attorney."

She said she and her family arrived from the U.S. as refugees, fleeing antisemitism and religious persecution.

"It feels like a real privilege to get to practice law when I wasn't even born here," Grinman said.

--As told to Kellie Mejdreich. Editing by Linda Voorhis.

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2025 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,100 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2025, to be eligible for this year's award.

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