

## Telecommunications Group Of The Year: Sheppard Mullin

By **Nadia Dreid**

*Law360 (January 22, 2020, 1:59 PM EST)* -- Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP scored some big wins for Charter Communications in 2019, carrying the telecom to victory in a decade-long dispute with the city of San Antonio over discriminatory fees and earning the firm a spot among Law360's 2019 Telecommunications Groups of the Year.

As the main firm handling the telecom behemoth's non-federal regulatory and litigation issues, Sheppard Mullin stayed busy in 2019, emerging from the year with several rulings in hand that made it easier for telecoms to get their infrastructure in place, according to the firm.

"The ability to deploy quickly, efficiently, cost-effectively is really key to success in that market, and the decision that we obtained clears the way for providers to be able to have that kind of access in Texas," trial partner Paul Werner told Law360.

After a decade of litigation that flowed through multiple courts and judges, the Texas Supreme Court ruled in May that San Antonio's municipal utility broke state law by collecting higher utility pole attachment fees from Time Warner Cable Texas — owned by Charter — than it collected from AT&T.

Both telecom giants were being charged the same in fees, but in practice, the utility was collecting a lower amount from AT&T and that didn't fly, the court ruled in an opinion penned by the longest-serving justice on the state's civil high court. That decision overturned a 2017 finding by a lower court that the utility hadn't broken the law requiring uniform rates, and drew the years-long saga to a close.

But shortly before that, Sheppard Mullin scored its first win of the year for Charter when the firm helped the company avoid being pulled back into a dispute with an Indiana property owner over cable that was laid under his land.

Werner said that case "sort of dovetails" with the Texas litigation in that it was tied to a dispute over access to property or structures that the cable company needed in order to build out its network and provide service.

"It's important because there's really a division in precedent, so establishing some good law in the



Seventh Circuit is good for our client and others who operate within the [that circuit],” he said.

The firm has about 15 attorneys specifically dedicated to telecom, but that number can balloon to as many as 50 attorneys depending on what the practice group is working on at the time, communications practice group head Brian Weimer told Law360.

“We are nimble and efficient and targeted,” Weimer said. “So basically, we have tremendous expertise and we put the right people on the team to get the job done really quickly.”

The telecom practice at Sheppard Mullin is only roughly a decade old, but in that time, the firm has managed to build up a solid core of attorneys to help carve out a niche for itself in the telecom space. Weimer joined the firm in 2009, as the firm was looking to bolster its telecom practice, and has seen it grow into its current form.

And while the firm is poised to expand a bit more in the next few years, it will be in Sheppard Mullin's traditional small steps over giant leaps fashion, Weimer said.

“We don't acquire other firms and we don't acquire large practices,” Weimer said. “Typically we do things one-off, with focused intent.”

And Werner said that the number of attorneys in any given practice isn't necessarily how they track growth.

“There's a really strong growth trajectory here, no matter how you look at it,” he said. “Our group in numbers continues to grow. Our growth in clients continues ... as well as our growth in the kinds of things we do for our clients. The practice really has continued to expand, and we continue to work on really cutting-edge or leading-edge problems for our clients.”

--Editing by Philip Shea.