

Estudio Beccar Varela opens criminal law department

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Argentina's Estudio Beccar Varela has opened a new criminal law department to be led by a new partner and associate specialising in financial crimes, while signalling that further hires are yet to come.



Manuel Beccar Varela

The new practice opened for business on the 6 March, and will be headed up by Manuel Beccar Varela, the founding partner of criminal law firm Alonso Fernandez, Beccar Varela & Richards. He is joined by associate Diego Seitún, who has previously worked as an associate at white collar crimes boutique Estudio Durrieu, with a further two lawyers scheduled to be hired in the coming months.

According to Estudio Beccar Varela managing partner Horacio Beccar Varela, the opening of the new department is designed to anticipate the growing demand for assistance in corporate criminal law matters and is part of an expansion strategy launched in 2010.

“In the past in Argentina, big law firms used to have one associate doing criminal work. We believed this was the wrong approach. We thought the way to do things differently was to create our own department within the law firm,” Horacio Beccar Varela says.

He adds that the firm has worked extensively in the past with Manuel Beccar Varela and his team over the past four years, seeking their advice on criminal law issues affecting clients. Previously, he says, Estudio Beccar Varela deferred considerable amounts of important work to both Manuel Beccar Varela’s firm and three other criminal law boutiques that the firm had links with, which the new department will be able to tackle instead.

The firm took the decision to open a criminal law department in October. This was followed by a month of discussions over who would be the right candidate to head up the department, which will focus on a range of financial crimes, including taxation issues, money laundering and corporate fraud. The result was negotiations with Manuel Beccar Varela, who in addition to having experience working for Argentina’s Ministry of Justice, has a working relationship with a large number of Estudio Beccar Varela’s lawyers.

The timing of the firm’s opening is also designed to coincide with the introduction in December of Argentina’s new legislation on financial crimes. Speaking to *Latin Lawyer* in January, several white collar crimes lawyers testified to increasing work from banks as they seek advice from law firms over how their operations should adapt to fit within the legislation’s framework.

Because of this, Horacio Beccar Varela hopes that the new department will confer a “competitive advantage” on the firm. He anticipates that other Argentine firms will follow suite, although they have yet to voice publicly their intentions to do so.

But introducing criminal lawyers into the very different working environment offered by a corporate firm could prove a challenge. “The typical criminal law firm is not used to working with client matters, so we have to change that mindset,” explains Manuel Beccar Varela. Size is another issue, as in Argentina most criminal law firms number no more than ten lawyers, whereas Estudio Beccar Varela counts over 120 lawyers among its staff. “For them, it’s like a different world,” says Horacio Beccar Varela.

But Manuel Beccar Varela points out that there are some advantages to collaborating with a full service firm. “I think the strength of the project is the way it combines the work of a criminal attorney with all the other specialists in other legal matters. Because we, as practical criminal lawyers, every day we have to study a lot about other legal matters, so having specialists in the same firm is very useful for our work as criminal lawyers,” he says.

In March last year, Estudio Beccar Varela lost five partners when they left to start up a new firm, Tanoira Cassagne Abogados.

Comments

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