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Katten to cut administrative staff as remote work changes firm's needs

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(Reuters) - Katten Muchin Rosenman is laying off some of its employees furloughed earlier this year, saying that months of remote work during the pandemic have changed its long-term needs for administrative staff.

The layoffs will hit in July and impact administrative staff, including executive assistants and facilities management and billing sector employees, in several U.S. offices.

No attorneys will be let go, said Katten spokeswoman Jacquelyn Heard on Tuesday. She declined to comment on how many staff will be laid off. They will receive one week of pay for each year they worked at the firm, with a minimum of eight weeks worth of pay.

Chicago-based Katten switched to remote work in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, and it doesn't expect to reopen most offices until at least the end of the summer, it said Tuesday in a statement. Even then, its "remote work practices will continue in a significant way," it said.

"Given this and the realization that our administrative needs are fully supported through new approaches we've taken that better fit the remote work model, we have determined that it is in the best interest of the firm to permanently separate from some of our currently furloughed employees," the firm said.

Katten in April announced staff and attorney furloughs, alongside sweeping pay cuts due to the pandemic, which dried up deal and trial work at many firms. Since then, business professionals in practice management have taken on more administrative duties and it has run smoothly, Heard said. The firm does not expect another round of layoffs, she said.

In May, the vast majority of nearly 225 law firm leaders, mostly from small or mid-sized firms, surveyed by the Managing Partner Forum during a webinar on the pandemic's impact said they expect a long-term drop in their needs for administrative staff.

Several large law firms have furloughed staff, and in some cases, attorneys, amid the pandemic. At least four firms, including Venable and Squire Patton Boggs, have since brought some of those employees back.

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