

Diversity and Inclusion at the Detroit Bar

BY TIFFANY ELLIS

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

AUDRE LORDE

In late 2019, the boards of the Detroit Bar Association and Detroit Bar Foundation gathered together to discuss our organizations’ strengths and weaknesses and create a vision of how we can be better in the future.

It is likely that before that meeting, all or most Detroit Bar board members would have told you, and believed, diversity is a core foundation of our organizations. After all, Detroit and its metropolitan area are steeped in a wealth of cultural influences from around the globe. Why wouldn’t our organizations reflect that naturally?

Yet, among the most poignant insights gained that day was the realization that the Detroit Bar’s efforts to attract, include, and value wide-ranging diversity among our members and leadership has been more passive than purposeful.

But now that is changing. We immediately formed a workgroup co-chaired by Foundation Board member Jim Rosenfeld and Third Circuit Court Administrator and Detroit Bar Board member Zenell Brown. Committee members also include: Tishia Browning, Tiffany Ellis, Jeannette Heacox, Janice Moore, Antoinette Star Porter, Joanne Geha Swanson, and Kimberly Yourchok.

Through the first two months of work, we have analyzed diversity traits self-reported by our members, identified areas for immediate and long-term improvement, and simply started to take action.

In February, the Detroit Bar Boards each adopted the organizations’ first-ever Diversity and Inclusion Pledge (see sidebar, opposite page). This statement isn’t just lip service but rather the first step in a process designed to fulfill our pledge.

In the coming months we will work with affinity bar associations to find ways to increase cross-representation and communication between our groups. We will talk to our own membership about how we can better value diversity and promote inclusion. And we need your help.

Right now there are numerous Detroit Bar Committees that need chairs, and many others that need more members. In June, members will also have the opportunity to run for a leadership position on the Detroit Bar Association Board of Directors. We are asking you to apply.

The Detroit Bar Association can only be as strong and diverse as the experiences and backgrounds our members and leaders bring to the table. We hope you will join us in encouraging seats for everyone at our table.

To find out more about current committee openings and the process for running for a Board position, please contact executive director Darlene Trudell at dtrudell@detroitlawyer.org.



TIFFANY R. ELLIS is an attorney with Weitz & Luxenberg and is a Detroit Bar Association board member. With a passion for social justice, she represents victims primarily in class actions, mass torts, and human trafficking and sex abuse cases.

Detroit Bar Commitment to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession

We, the leaders and signatory members of the Detroit Bar Association, play a critical role in ensuring that inclusion is core to our Association and we have a responsibility to use our influence to create a profession that welcomes practitioners representative of the communities we serve.

We believe that inclusion must be part of the conversation to attract, educate, train, retain, mentor, and promote diverse attorneys to leadership positions within Michigan bar associations, firms, agencies, organizations, and the judiciary.

We believe that advancing diversity and inclusion raises the bar for the entire profession and we encourage our members to practice with their “whole self”—race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, disability, religion, age, veteran status, marital/parental/caregiver status, socioeconomic status, and any other characteristic that makes a lawyer uniquely experienced to bring perspective so we can learn from one another.

We believe that our partnerships with K-12 schools, colleges, and law schools are fundamental to establishing a pipeline of diverse talent and commit to hold ourselves as beacons of encouragement for students—especially prospective first-generation-lawyers—to see this profession as an option for themselves.

We recognize that we are not experts; and we commit to be a resource for any law firm, corporate legal department, judge, government agency, or partner bar association that wishes to embark on this journey with us to cooperatively advance diversity and inclusion efforts in a trusting environment to collaboratively continue the progress.

Therefore, we commit to take steps to act on these beliefs and to promote diversity and inclusion within the Detroit Bar Association and our profession.

SAVE THE DATE

Annual Dinner

Join 300 lawyers and judges at Raising the Bar 2020, the Detroit Bar’s annual meeting, which will be held at the Detroit Golf Club on June 11, 2020.

The event is from 5–8 p.m. Tickets are \$75, though judges receive complimentary admission. The price of registration includes appetizers and a drink ticket. A cash bar will be available throughout the evening.

Help grow the Detroit Bar Association! When you bring a guest (in practice at least one year) who turns in their membership application on site, you will each receive an additional drink ticket.

To register or become a sponsor, please visit DetroitLawyer.org or contact Darlene Trudell at dtrudell@detroitlawyer.org or 313-961-6120, ext. 201.



Archer Gala

The 16th Annual Dennis W. Archer Public Service Award Gala is scheduled for November 19, 2020 at the Detroit Yacht Club.

Archer Award winners all have one thing in common—each is an attorney or jurist who exemplifies the ideal of the law as public service. Proceeds will fund free legal clinics and community outreach programs.

Interested in sponsoring? It is a great way to get your name out to over 26,000 lawyers in metropolitan Detroit. 400 attendees will be gathering for an evening of networking, excellent food, and celebration. For information, contact Darlene Trudell at dtrudell@detroitlawyer.org or 313-961-6120, ext. 201, or visit DetroitLawyer.org.