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MINNESOTA LAWYER

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MINNESOTA LAWYER
**DIVERSITY
& INCLUSION**
2021



4

Stronger Together

8

Diversity & Inclusion
2021 Honorees

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Letter from the Editor

When resources, energy and talent are gathered together and focused on a singular task, the results can make an immediate impact.

In this issue's cover story, Stronger Together, you will read how affinity bar associations and their leaders have continued their work together, uniting against injustice. Last year, we highlighted the effort the groups begun in the wake of the murder of George Floyd to fight prejudice and the dehumanizing of victims of violence.

Last December the bar associations came together formally as the Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color to continue their work, this time to produce a report examining the representation of color and women in participating law firms and corporate legal departments. Early results found that the median percentage of racial and ethnic lawyers at Twin Cities firms was well below the national average. More data analysis will be released next month.

"We've got a way to go but it's good to get something out there," says Frank Aba-Onu of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL) in the story regarding the results released in December.

In this special issue of Minnesota Lawyer, we celebrate efforts like these and others that aim to make a more equitable world — such as the lawyer who strives develop policies, rules and laws to improve outcomes for American Indian families; the volunteer who aims to give back and offer young Latinos an example of success in the legal profession; and the "teacher at heart" who finds mentors to help high school students better understand the legal system.

Minnesota Lawyer is honored to recognize our honorees for their work to promote diversity and inclusion. Your stories show us all what is possible, with a bit of energy, talent and passion.

—Joel Schettler, editor

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Stronger Together

Bar leaders of color use data
in pressing for transparency,
accountability

By Todd Nelson
Special to Minnesota
Lawyer





Leaders of the affinity bar associations representing Minnesota's attorneys of color came together last year — in light of the George Floyd killing — to issue a joint declaration condemning “criminalization of black and brown victims.”

Last December, they coalesced formally as the Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color (MN-CBAC) to publish the Twin Cities Legal Diversity & Inclusion Data Project.

The project reported on the representation of attorneys of color and women in participating law firms and corporate law departments that voluntarily provided data. The lack of diversity it revealed — with the share of minority lawyers exceeding the national average of 17% at only three of 18 Twin Cities law firms in the report — drew excoriating criticism from a panel of notable attorneys. The median percentage of racial and ethnic lawyers at Twin Cities firms in the report was 10%.

Now, the presidents of the four groups — Frank Aba-Onu of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL); Arielle Wagner, Minnesota American Indian Bar Association (MAIBA); Richard Greiffenstein, Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association (MHBA); and Sukanya Momsen, Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association (MNAPABA); — are working with advisers on the next edition of the Twin Cities Legal Diversity & Inclusion Data Project.

The results of the data analysis are to be disclosed and discussed in a virtual event from noon to 1:30 p.m. on Oct. 5.

The project's advisory team suggested creating MN-CBAC to help with the diversity data report and collaborate on issues of common interest, Aba-Onu said.



“All the bar associations have expressed support for actions that help ensure our judiciary and public sector legal entities reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.”

– Ivan Fong



Sukanyam Momsen



Richard Greiffenstein

Increasing diversity, accountability

“The big sort of (MN-CBAC) branding issue is the yearly data reveal, which would show the data from the bigger and mid-sized law firms and the bigger corporations, to spur the conversations, get things started and talk about how we can increase diversity going forward and also show accountability,” said Aba-Onu said, who noted that MN-CBAC hoped to add the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office and other legal departments of larger public employers such as Hennepin and Ramsey counties to the next data project.

Of the results released in December, Aba-Onu said, “We’ve got a way to go, but it’s good to get something out there.”

Greiffenstein said last year’s findings were “shocking to some extent. But we’re hopeful and optimistic that we’re moving in the right direction.”

Momsen agreed that the numbers weren’t great. “I’m excited to see if there’s any improvement this year in the

numbers based on that, based on those coming to light in the public eye.”

Momsen, associate corporate counsel at Best Buy, won’t have to look far to see change in one case.

In December, while women accounted for more than half of Best Buy’s Twin Cities-based legal department of approximately 40 attorneys, attorneys of color accounted for only 8%. Best Buy’s legal department had no Latinx, Black or Indigenous attorneys.

Diverse team ‘critical’

Since then, half of the new lawyers hired in the Twin Cities are attorneys of color, Best Buy general counsel Todd Hartman said. “To be the best at what we do, it’s absolutely critical to have a diverse team that brings their unique experiences to the work,” he said.

While Best Buy knew it could do better and had recently announced new commitments to hire more diverse candidates, Hartman said MN-CBAC leaders and data project advisers including Ivan Fong, executive vice president,

chief legal and policy officer and secretary at 3M Co., were “a prime instigator in us making a material change in our department in less than a year.”

Best Buy did not “tip the scale” in favor of diverse candidates, Hartman said, but focused more on making sure they were within the applicant pool. Job postings “tended to be way too narrow and specific” and were “screening out way too many qualified candidates.”

“Some of that was the ability to look at new sources of candidates,” Hartman said. “A lot of it too was making sure we considered the right slate of candidates ... We needed to make sure that people weren’t self-screening themselves from the job based on what we said were preferred qualifications.”

3M’s Fong said the analysis of disaggregated data from large Twin Cities law firms and corporate law departments continues. 3M led last year’s data analysis and is supporting Cargill, which is leading this year’s effort.

As of mid-2020, 44% of 3M’s 98 attor-

neys in Minnesota were women, and 22% were people of color, according to last December's data release.

Data creates transparency

The data project's main mission, Fong said, is to leverage "transparency to help hold the legal community accountable... It reminds the community that while we have made some progress in this area, there is still more work to do. If we each take some ownership and take seriously the benefits of being part of a more diverse profession, we should see that commitment reflected in the data over time."

Bar associations in other major metropolitan areas and corporate general counsel have contacted him to ask how to replicate the projects in their cities and legal departments, "and that's been very heartening."

He and other advisers, Fong said, have been working MN-CBAC leaders to identify areas of common interest for the new group to address.

"There are, for example, the anti-Asian hate incidents that we experienced and continue to see here in Minnesota as well as nationally," Fong said. "The issues in Afghanistan with the resettlement of Afghan refugees and related immigration law issues may be another area of common interest. And all the bar associations have expressed support for actions that help ensure our judiciary and public sector legal entities reflect the diversity of the communities they serve."

'Moved the needle'

Summra Shariff, executive director

and president of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice (TCDIP), said MN-CBAC "helped move the needle in getting corporate law departments and more law firms to provide disaggregated demographic data that wasn't previously available publicly for some organizations." TCDIP is a nonprofit association of more than 60 law firms and corporate legal departments working to strengthen members' recruitment, advancement and retention of attorneys of color. Shariff, a supporter of the data project, hopes to see more firms and more corporate legal departments take part in the future.

"We've seen that corporate legal departments are growing and that they continue to recruit more talent," Shariff said. "They are not only asking for diversity from outside counsel but they're also building more diverse teams internally."

Shariff also would like the project to incorporate data on LGBTQ representation and representation by job title, to see, for example, how many women of color partners or general counsels of color are in the Twin Cities legal community.

"It's important to pay attention to what the advancement of attorneys of color with intersectional identities looks like, meaning we take a closer look at the pathways to leadership ranks within firms and companies," Shariff said.

The MN-CBAC presidents acknowledge the efforts of advisory team members Ann Anaya, chief diversity officer and vice president, global di-



Arielle Wagner

versity and inclusion, 3M; Jerry Blackwell, founder and chairman of Blackwell & Burke P.A.; U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Tony Leung; Don Liu, executive vice president and chief legal and risk officer at Target Corp.; Thomas Nelson, partner, Stinson; Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Peter Reyes; Anna Richo, general counsel, chief compliance officer, corporate secretary, Cargill; and Yen Florczak, senior vice president and chief intellectual property counsel, 3M, who acted as coordinator between the advisory team and MN-CBAC, facilitating the data project. ^M



"The [data will] spur the conversations, get things started and talk about how we can increase diversity going forward and also show accountability."

— Frank Aba-Onu



Pictured are, from left to right Maria Cisneros, Amy Schutt, Kiarra Zackery, Jamar Hardy, Corrine Heine, Kirsten Santelices, Tran Nguyen and Jared Shepherd

Just Deeds

Minnesota's first racially restrictive deed appeared in in Minneapolis 1910, when Henry and Leonora Scott sold a property on 35th Avenue South to Nels Anderson. The deed contained this provision: "The premises shall not at any time be conveyed, mortgaged or leased to any person or persons of Chinese, Japanese, Moorish, Turkish, Negro, Mongolian or African blood or descent."

The 1968 federal Fair Housing Act made such covenants illegal. But that doesn't mean their effects aren't still being felt. Segregated communities and lopsided rates of home ownership between races are still very much a reality.

The newly created Just Deeds coalition is looking to change that. Just Deeds members provide free legal and title services aimed at helping property owners find discriminatory covenants and discharge them from their property titles. Just Deeds also provides education to help communities acknowledge this racist history. So far, the coalition has discharged 101 biased covenants.

"One main thrust of the project is the work of mapping dis-

criminatory covenants in Hennepin County," said Jared Shepherd, an attorney with Campbell Knutson in Eagan. "Groups that had been part of creating these covenants — such as real estate businesses — wanted to help get rid of them."

Eleven cities are participating in the effort, including several Minneapolis suburbs and Rochester. The coalition's founding members include Edina Realty Title, Minneapolis Area Realtors, Mapping Prejudice, the Minnesota Association of City Attorneys and the city of Golden Valley.

"Golden Valley was the first place to implement the project," said Shepherd.

The Just Deeds website (justdeeds.org) contains ways for a number of people to get involved, including homeowners, buyers, sellers, attorneys, government officials and real estate professionals.

"The idea is to acknowledge that it happened, and to educate our communities about this practice as a way to build equitable communities," said Shepherd.

—Dan Heilman



AT THE HEART OF INCLUSION

Congratulations to our own Connie Lahn for receiving the Diversity and Inclusion Award. As a leader and president of the Barnes & Thornburg Racial and Social Justice Foundation, she inspires us all by promoting, advocating, and effecting change in our community.



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Pictured are, from left to right, Sukanya Momsen, Grace Kim, Christopher Jison, Nicole Dailo, Mayura Noordyke and Stephanie Chen.

Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association

As violence against Asian Americans and people of color grew during the pandemic, a local legal affinity organization began promoting anti-racism programming and activism.

The Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association (MNAPABA) created an anti-racism committee with two distinct sections. “This ended up becoming a much bigger endeavor with a lot more members interested in working on these efforts than we initially realized,” said Sukanya Momsen, the association’s president and associate corporate counsel at Best Buy.

Nicole Dailo, Life Time Inc. corporate counsel and MNAPABA vice president of outreach, worked with one section of the new committee on programming and anti-racism initiatives. Momsen worked with the other section of the committee to write statements and make decisions on funding other anti-discrimination initiatives.

Since the committee started in 2020, it has helped the organization develop statements on George Floyd’s murder, Derek Chauvin’s conviction, and violence against people of color. The committee has also held listening sessions for its

members after the horrific events in Atlanta earlier this year. “I’m really hoping the group can accomplish in the coming years something that’s proactive and addresses the incidents of racist actions against Asian Americans and people of color in Minnesota,” Dailo said.

Begun in 1989, MNAPABA boasts over 300 active members. The group puts together educational and networking events, continuing education courses, and meet-and-greets. It shares news of job openings and award submissions. And it hosts a number of unique committees, from the Women’s Committee to the In-House Counsel Network.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many organizations to find ways to pivot their typical activities to the virtual world, and this was no exception for MNAPABA. But committees stayed active and MNAPABA continued to hold many Zoom events.

“We’re still here helping people create their own success stories,” Momsen said. “We’re still helping APA attorneys find jobs and mentors.”

—Frank Jossi

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Minnesota Humanities Center



Two years ago, attorney Kevin Lindsey accepted a job offer that would take his career in a different direction but continue his passion for tackling diversity and inclusion issues when he joined the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) as chief executive officer.

“What I like about the humanities is the storytelling aspect, the opportunity to amplify stories of people that are not in the public mainstream,” he said. “The idea of listening to and providing those stories intrigued me. The humanities can play a role in facilitating a more inclusive world for all.”

Lindsey came to the Humanities Center after working nearly eight years as commissioner of the State’s Department of Human Rights. He oversaw Gov. Mark Dayton’s DE&I Council implementation, investigated complaints of discrimination, audited equal-opportunity and equal-pay cases involving state contractors and supported anti-bullying and educational inclusion initiatives. During his time in office, the department supported the enactment and facilitated the implementation of “ban the box” law forbidding employers from prematurely screening out ex-offenders. Throughout his career, the University of Iowa College of Law graduate worked in law firms as in-house counsel and as a county attorney.

Upon Lindsey joining the Humanities Center, MHC adopted a new mission and a vision statement of seeking to create a just society that is “curious, connected, and compassionate.” Despite the pandemic, MHC has embraced its new vision and has greatly expanded its offerings. In the past year, Lindsey has overseen immersive educational, civic, and history programs.

Lindsey added that he is excited about the future at MHC in education. “We’re coming up on the 250th anniversary of our country,” he said. “It’s a great time to have an inclusive conversation within our schools, our state and our country, one that reexamines the founding principles of democracy and charts the path for the next 250 years.”

—Frank Jossi

Pictured is Kevin Lindsey, Minnesota Humanities Center CEO

Congratulations!

To the Coalition of Bar Associations of Color's Leadership Team

JERRY W. BLACKWELL:

Combines excellence with diversity in action.

Congratulations to The Coalition of Bar Associations of Color's Project Advisors - Jerry W. Blackwell, Judge Tony Leung, Don H. Liu, Thomas F. Nelson and Anna Richo – on being honored in the 2021 Minnesota Lawyer – Diversity & Inclusion Awards for their work over the past year.

The Coalition brings together members of four bar associations of color - MABL, MHBA, MNAPABA, and MAIBA, to do, among other things, advance matters of common interest, identify issues of concern and improve advocacy in the quest for equal justice in Minnesota.

Under the direction of the Project Advisors, the Twin Cities Diversity in Practice collected and collated data from across the Twin Cities and across the United States from each member organization in various categories. This data is used to raise awareness regarding diversity and inclusion thereby affecting change in the methods used to recruit, retain and advance attorneys of color.

Mr. Blackwell's commitment to diversity extends far beyond his civil practice and to his community. Ongoing diversity commitments include serving as a lead Special Assistant Attorney General in the successful prosecution of former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. In 2020, in tandem with the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial, Mr. Blackwell and Partner Corey Gordon secured the first posthumous pardon in Minnesota history for Max Mason, a young Black man who was wrongfully convicted of raping a White woman in 1920.

Mr. Blackwell is also a co-founder and two-time president of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL), a bar association that promotes the professional development of Black lawyers, judges and law students in Minnesota, and advances education, excellence and racial equity in the pursuit of justice. In 2011, Governor Mark Dayton appointed Mr. Blackwell to serve as an at-large member of the Minnesota Commission on Judicial Appointments. He served two terms until 2019.



Blackwell Burke is a certified minority-owned trial firm that represents corporate clients in high stakes class actions, mass torts, MDLs, and commercial litigation, both at trial and on appeal.

Blackwell Burke remains the most diverse law firm in Minnesota representing Fortune 500 companies as national or trial counsel nationwide.

The firm has been repeatedly recognized as one of the top litigation defense firms in the country by BTI, Chambers, Best Lawyers, and others. Benchmark Litigation named Blackwell Burke the Minnesota Firm of the Year in each of the last three years.





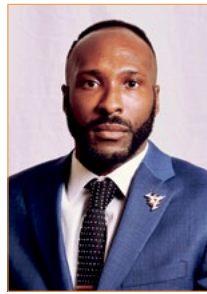
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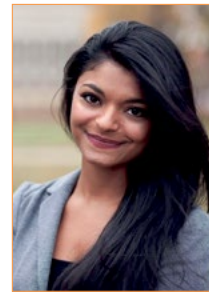
Eric Rucker



Frank Aba-Onu



Yen Florczak



Sukanya Momsen



Ivan Fong



Judge Peter Reyes



Judge Tony Leung



Anna Richo



Jerry Blackwell



Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color

When it comes to increasing diversity and inclusion in Minnesota law firms and legal departments, the wheels sometimes turn slowly.

The newly formed Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color (MN-CBAC) intends to keep a watchful eye on those issues on behalf of its constituent members.

Late in 2020, MN-CBAC was formed by members of the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association, the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association, Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers and the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association.

The groups joined forces to form the coalition in hopes of advancing issues of common interest and concern; provide mutual support and professional development; and collectively improve the legal profession and access to justice in Minnesota.

“It’s an ongoing effort to leverage transparency to help hold firms and legal departments accountable,” said Ivan Fong, executive vice president/chief legal and policy officer and secre-

tary at 3M Company.

The way the coalition sees it, the transparency of diversity and inclusion representation data will promote accountability.

In December 2020, MN-CBAC held a launch event to introduce the collaboration and to disseminate a report containing diversity and inclusion data to an audience of large law firms and corporate legal departments in Minnesota.

The results were eye-opening. In terms of female attorneys, no Twin Cities firm could claim higher than 45%. The firm with the highest racial and ethnic representation could boast only 22%.

In 3M Legal Affairs’ 2020 Equity, Justice & Inclusion Annual Report, the company showed examples of how the manufacturing giant’s legal department has made admirable strides, but with more work ahead.

MN-CBAC would like to increase the number of firms and corporations that participate in next year’s report.

“It’s an ongoing task,” said Fong.

—Dan Heilman

James C. Burroughs II

CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA

In recent months, diversity and inclusion has become a top priority for businesses, agencies and other organizations. James C. Burroughs II has been working for the cause of diversity and equality longer than most people, for more than two decades.

A Detroit native who earned his law degree at Georgetown University, Burroughs came to Minnesota in 1992 as law clerk for a federal magistrate judge. Then he practiced law for four years with Dorsey & Whitney, before becoming COO and counsel for Minneapolis-based Summit Academy.

He later started a consulting firm, helping other minority business owners succeed. From 2008 to 2015, Burroughs served as the Minneapolis Public Schools executive director for equity and diversity, until Gov. Mark Dayton named him Minnesota's first chief inclusion officer.

Burroughs' daughter, who is 9 years old, has been a Children's Minnesota patient since her birth, receiving treatment for sickle cell anemia. That hospital-parent relationship led to Burroughs' current position as vice president, chief equity and inclusion officer, effective Jan. 9, 2021.

Burroughs' primary job is helping Children's Minnesota advance its commitment to partnering with patients, families and the community to implement equitable solutions.

"What drew me to Children's was the need to eliminate some of the historic health care disparities that have historically caused damage, even death, to underserved communities." He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has been "much more detrimental" to communities of color than it has to the overall population, due to causes including lack of access to the quality health care and lack of insurance.

At Children's, Burroughs has led the development of a strategic plan to advance diversity, equity and inclusion; created an internship program designed to provide a more racially diverse employee pipeline; enhanced and aligned the organization's six employee resource groups; designed a revised approach to safety and security; and led an organizational commitment to transparency in the development of racial data reporting for hiring, retention and supplier diversity.

Burroughs has also led the implementation of executive equity coaching and leadership development.

—Dan Emerson





Jill Kehaulani Esch

MINNESOTA OMBUDSPERSON FOR AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES

Minnesota, a state that has historically taken pride in ranking high in quality-of-life measures, also leads the nation in one not-so-desirable category.

The state ranks first in the number of American Indian children removed from their families by child protection agencies, according to government data cited by Jill Kehaulani Esch, the state's ombudsperson for American Indian families.

Since her appointment to the position in 2013, Esch has monitored cases to ensure the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) are followed.

A Native Hawaiian who came to Minnesota in 2000 to attend law school, Esch investigates complaints of noncompliance with the ICWA, MIFPA and child protection rules and policies. She also collaborates with tribes, agencies, counties, community organizations, courts, schools and other organizations to improve outcomes for American Indian families.

A graduate of the University of Hawaii at Manoa and Mitchell Hamline School of Law, Esch said problems are often caused by those who do not know the law passed in 1978 to protect the rights of Indian children and families: The Indian Child Welfare Act.

"If everyone followed the law and did what they are supposed to, Indian children would not be removed from their families to the degree they are. Then, Minnesota would no longer lead the nation in that category," she said, emphasizing the need to include parents and other families members in the decision-making process on where children should be placed when they need to be removed from their homes.

When Esch encounters parents' attorneys who don't know the law well, she encourages parents "to reach out to me so I can provide them information and resources [the law doesn't permit her to provide legal advice]." She sometimes fields as many as 20 calls a day from Indian parents seeking help.

An active member of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), in 2017, Esch received NICWA's Member of the Year Award. Since 2017, she has co-chaired the Children and Families Chapter for the United States Ombudsman Association.

—Dan Emerson



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Loan Huynh

FREDRIKSON & BYRON PA

The images of Afghans fleeing Kabul as American forces withdrew in August brought back memories for Fredrikson & Byron PA shareholder and immigration attorney Loan Huynh, who escaped Vietnam with her family in 1975.

“The similarities between Afghanistan and Vietnam are hard to ignore,” she said. “To watch it as it happens is re-traumatizing for many of us who are reliving what happened to them more than 40 years ago.”

Huynh helps employers, employees, individuals and families secure visas to work and live in the United States. As the chair/shareholder in the firm’s immigration group, her clients include companies in health care, hospitality, agribusiness, life sciences, biotechnology, information technology and building trades. From hospitals to resorts, many employers face a labor shortage and are desperately seeking all options including sponsoring international workers qualified to meet labor needs, she said.

Although immigration law remains unchanged under the Biden administration “the attitude toward immigration has changed,” she said. We “are living under an environment where the message now is that if you are different, you are still welcome in the United States.”

Huynh is active in organizations that promote diversity and inclusion within the legal profession and assist victims of human rights abuses by serving on the the Board of the Advocates for Human Rights. Her passion for diversity and inclusion also led her to co-found the Women of Color In the Law Forum.

The path to becoming a female partner of color at a major law firm has been challenging. “It’s not been an easy path for, for me as a woman of color to do this. Look at the numbers in our legal industry in Minnesota, across the United States,” Huynh said. “It’s really critical for others like me to lift others like me and to let others know that it is possible, while challenging, it is possible.”

—Frank Jossi

AMAZING INSPIRES AMAZING.



Congratulations to
James C. Burroughs II,
vice president, chief equity and
inclusion officer at Children's Minnesota,
for being recognized as an Honoree at
the 2021 Minnesota Lawyer Diversity &
Inclusion awards.

As one of the largest freestanding pediatric health systems in the nation, Children's Minnesota serves as The Kid Experts™ for a diverse patient population — nearly half of whom are people of color.

Since joining Children's Minnesota in 2019, James has worked across the organization to create an inclusive, safe environment where everyone who engages with us — patients, families, employees, vendors and community partners — feels valued, respected and supported. This includes fostering a culture that reflects the diverse backgrounds of the communities we serve. His work has contributed to reducing health disparities and creating a more engaging place to work, bringing Children's Minnesota closer to achieving our vision of being every family's essential partner in raising healthier children.

Get involved by joining the Children's Minnesota Advocacy Network at
childrensMN.org/advocacy.



Ann Jenrette-Thomas

STINSON

It can be easy to pay lip service to the idea of diversity and inclusion, but Ann Jenrette-Thomas makes it a personal and professional mission.

“The legal system comes with high stakes and high stress,” said Jenrette-Thomas, chief diversity and inclusion officer for Stinson in Minneapolis since 2016. “You can’t always default to your good intentions. You have to be focused on systemic changes.”

Holder of a law degree from Georgetown University, Jenrette-Thomas understands law firm culture — including its need to create a welcoming culture for legal professionals of all backgrounds.

In that sense, Jenrette-Thomas looks at both individuals and the system that contains them.

“I ensure that both internally and in terms of career-enhancing opportunities externally, that we’re advancing an equitable workplace,” she said.

Under her leadership, Stinson has seen a number of milestones when it comes to diversity and inclusion:

- A 120% increase in attorneys of color.
- The creation of eight employee resource groups to foster greater inclusion, professional development, and business development among women, people of color, LGBT individuals and veterans.
- The launch of a Minority Fellowship for 1L students that provides up to \$30,000 in tuition help, as well as a 1L summer associate position with the possibility of a second summer associate gig the following year.

Jenrette-Thomas cites a good relationship with firm management as part of the reason some of these initiatives have been allowed to thrive. She has the freedom to not only flag potential problems, but to also craft the right solutions.

“We see the differences in people for the purpose of finding opportunities in inclusion, retention, and allowing people to advance in their careers,” she said. “It helps them, and it ultimately helps the firm.”

—Dan Heilman



CONGRATULATIONS LOAN HUYNH

Recipient of the Diversity & Inclusion 2021 Award
Minnesota Lawyer

Fredrikson & Byron congratulates our colleague
and all of the 2021 honorees.

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Connie Lahn

BARNES & THORNBURG

After the world-changing death of George Floyd in 2020, the management committee at Minneapolis law firm Barnes & Thornburg took positive action by launching the Barnes & Thornburg Racial and Social Justice Foundation, to support organizations that focus on promoting, advocating and effecting racial and social justice.

Managing partner Connie Lahn was appointed as chair, in charge of drafting the founding documentation, setting up rules and guidelines for donations and more. In its first six months, the Foundation received \$200,000 in donations from employees and partners, which was used to make donations to organizations in Atlanta, Indianapolis, Los Angeles and Minneapolis.

Locally, the Foundation donated \$50,000 to an innovative organization called All Square, which enrolls and pays for people who are incarcerated to study to become a paralegal or an attorney. With the Foundation, “we wanted to create a long-term commitment,” Lahn said. “This year we have already raised \$300,000” within the firm.

Promoting equal opportunity and diversity has been a primary interest for Lahn since college. She is a member of an American College of Bankruptcy Fellows Committee on Diversity, which is examining “what are we doing wrong and what could we be doing better.”

Speaking of diversity — or lack of it — Lahn remembers the first time she was involved in a large Chapter 11 case, in 2016. “The judge was a woman, one of the other counsels involved was a Black man and my local counsel was a Black woman. That was the first time in all these years I had seen that much diversity” in one case, said Lahn, who has also been a longtime member of the Minnesota Women Lawyers Advisory board, and Twin Cities Diversity in Practice’s Leadership Council. “It has not happened since.”

In 2019, Lahn was inducted into the prestigious American College of Bankruptcy, becoming one of only four women members of the college in the 8th Judicial Circuit. Lahn also serves on the ACB’s DEI committee to help promote and encouraged nomination of diverse members.

As the Minneapolis office managing partner, Lahn was instrumental in changing the culture at Barnes & Thornburg to promote a culture where “people respect and treat each other well.”

—Dan Emerson

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Lariss Maldonado

WELLS FARGO

Lariss Maldonado sees her leadership roles in volunteer organizations as an opportunity to give back and offer young Latinos an example of success in the legal profession.

“I didn’t know lawyers or professionals growing up, and it was difficult to see a path forward,” said Maldonado, senior counsel in enterprise risk management execution at Wells Fargo. “I became a lawyer because I didn’t want to be hungry. Now, I am driven to engage in community organizations because I want to be visible in the community to be a role model. I hope that I can inspire young people to see the law as a possibility.”

In the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association, Maldonado served as president and co-chaired a selection committee that works to identify people of color to apply for the bench and supports vetted candidates in their application process, including reviewing submissions and conducting mock interviews. “We endeavor to give candidates substantive, constructive feedback, and help them get to where they need to be to put their best foot forward,” she said. “The courts have the most fundamental and most direct impact on ensuring justice for the community.”

Maldonado joined the board of the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota in late 2016 during a time in which she believed all aspects of civil liberties and rights were in jeopardy. She likes ACLU-MN’s approach that leverages legal representation, legislative advocacy and community engagement to offer. The organization offers “a holistic opportunity to serve the public and to serve civil liberties and civil rights,” she said.

Maldonado also has had leadership roles with the Twin Cities Diversity in Practice and the Minnesota State Bar Association. “Supporting people of color in their careers and is critical,” she said. “Everything I learned and the goals I’ve achieved have been with the support of sponsors and mentors in the community.”

—Frank Jossi





Thomas Pack

GREENBERG TRAURIG LLP

Greenberg Traurig LLP attorney Thomas Pack, who has spent his career encouraging diversity, equity and inclusion, sees the Twin Cities area's commitment to DEI in two general ways.

"I think the Twin Cities is really blessed to have such coordinated DEI efforts among organizations which would otherwise be competitors," he said. On the other hand, Pack said, "It's far behind where it should be. I think every time we rightfully pat ourselves on the back for the good work that's been done so far, we need to stop and reflect on how far we need to go."

Pack, gay and a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, devotes a significant amount of time and energy to volunteer organizations. Recently he joined the board of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice, a nonprofit association of more than 60 law firms and corporations seeking to attract and retain attorneys of color in the Twin Cities.

"It's really remarkable to have Twin Cities Diversity in Practice where law firms — which compete with each other for talent and work — come together to further the overall goal of promoting and advancing diverse attorneys," Pack said.

The pool of diverse attorneys will not grow without increasing the pipeline of people seeking legal careers. But people of color and LGBTQ+ people face obstacles to college and law school because of their diverse genders, racial identities, sexual orientations, and economic status, he said. His other DEI efforts include work on behalf of the National Native American Bar Association, where he helped draft a statement calling for greater Native representation in the legal profession. He also chairs the organization's Young Lawyers Committee.

Pack often addresses LGBTQ+ issues in articles and panel discussions and will continue to do so "because we're not as far along the path of inclusion as we should be."

—Frank Jossi



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Sonja Dunnwald Peterson

MINNESOTA DISABILITY LAW CENTER

A veteran employment attorney, Sonja Dunnwald Peterson recently shifted gears to work as staff attorney at the Minnesota Disability Law Center of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid.

In fact, Peterson has considered herself a civil and human rights attorney for her entire career. She has a background of supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities, both in the employment realm and now with the Disability Law Center.

“We primarily work on cases having to do with public accommodations,” said Peterson. “Government entities and businesses providing lawful accommodations for people with disabilities — that’s what we’re most concerned with.”

The Minnesota Disability Law Center provides legal services through legal advocacy, negotiation, mediation, litigation and handling of administrative and court proceedings. It provides free civil legal assistance to individuals with disabilities statewide, regardless of age or income, on legal issues related to their disabilities.

For Peterson, that means, among other things, litigating ADA-related public access cases all the way from intake to appeal.

Due in part to COVID-19, Peterson hasn’t had any direct litigation activity since joining the Disability Law Center. But that doesn’t mean she hasn’t been busy.

“I’m primarily working on issues through the state Department of Human Rights, or the Department of Justice,” she said.

Among MDLC’s initiatives is making sure that disability benefits are properly administered. It works with the Social Security Administration in cases where that body decides that a person with disabilities who gets benefits can’t manage them on their own. MDLC helps make sure that the people managing that money are doing their jobs right.

“The clients are always the most meaningful part of whatever I do,” said Peterson. “The law is designed to protect the rights of these people, and that’s meaningful. They deserve to have a fully accessible life.”

—Dan Heilman



MH

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We salute all of the honorees for their efforts to create
a more diverse and inclusive legal community



Congratulations to our alumni being recognized with
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Jill Kehaulani Esch '03, Minnesota Ombudsperson
for American Indian Families

Connie Lahn '96, Barnes & Thornburg

Sonja Dunnwald Peterson '85, Disability Law Center

Alice Silkey '86, Emerita Professor, Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Judge Sophia Vuelo '98, Ramsey County District Court

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INDIVIDUAL

Jules Porter

SERAPH 7 STUDIOS

As a lifelong gamer who began playing Nintendo's "Super Mario" games as a kid, Jules Porter saw that few characters that looked anything like her.

Years later, while attending the University of St. Thomas School of Law and pursuing a joint master's of business degree, she saw how the country reacted to several shootings of young black men. Porter thought about what she might do to make a difference, and it came to her on a semester abroad in Rome when she found the city familiar because of the many hours she played a video game set there: "Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood."

"A lightbulb went off," she said. Porter left a promising law career and started a video gaming company, Seraph 7 Studios, to create positive images of people of color. If she could navigate Rome with knowledge gleaned from a video game, others could learn from seeing emphatic and heroic non-white characters.

"I believe we can loop people in with a game design that

more authentically shows the black experience and black characters," she said.

Only 3% of characters in video games are black, yet 80% of black kids play them, she said. Likewise, women represent 40% of video game players but only 25% of characters, usually depicted as sex objects. "I'm a Marine Corps veteran. I've never gone into combat half-naked; I would never dress like Wonder Woman," Porter said.

Working out of the Finnovation Lab in Minneapolis, she will release her first video game next year. Her nonprofit "Center for Imaginative Technology" developed a three-year STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) course for K-12 students and an apprenticeship program, both focused on gaming. Porter's goal is to make Minnesota a video gaming center.

Porter still does pro bono legal work. "I feel like the law is still part of my calling," Porter said. "It's just what I'm meant to do on this earth."

—Frank Jossi

**Greenberg Traurig
proudly congratulates our colleague,
Tom Pack, on being named one of
Minnesota Lawyer's 2021
Diversity & Inclusion honorees.**

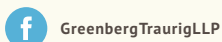
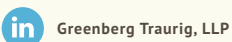


We are inspired by Tom's pro bono work in the civil rights and immigration law fields, and his focus on representing asylum seekers fleeing persecution on account of their LGBTQ+ sexual orientations and/or gender identities.

Since GT's inception, we've been committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We're proud to have lawyers receive this honor in consecutive years.

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Judge Shari Schluchter

BELTRAMI COUNTY DISTRICT COURT

The Minnesota Judicial Branch's Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ) has played an important part in eliminating bias from court operations, promoting equal access to the court and increasing trust and public confidence in the state's judiciary.

Beltrami County District Court Judge Shari Schluchter has played a key role in helping the CEJ — an ad hoc committee of the Minnesota Judicial Council — fulfill its mission by serving as its co-chair for six years before stepping down at the end of 2020.

"I was an at-large member of the Minnesota Judicial Council, so it was a natural fit for me to be part of CEJ," said Schluchter. "That way I would have the benefit of attending Judicial Council meetings to help these two groups work together."

In particular, Schluchter was a driving force in making sure that that Beltrami County examined its high rate of probation revocations, especially as they pertained to American Indians. That effort meant looking at one year of cases, analyzing the charges, determining the presiding judge, the probation officer, and looking at why the case resulted in a revocation to prison.

That led to working with the Department of Corrections to see how they can better meet the needs of American Indian probationers to enable them to be successful on probation.

The results? In 2017, Beltrami County had 113 probation revocations to prison. In 2019, only 47 revocations occurred. As of September 2020, only 21 revocations had occurred. Also, the disparity lessened in the rates in which American Indian probationers were revoked to prison as compared to other races.

The committee's work has become a model for other judicial districts that are seeking to ensure that their probation revocations are done fairly and without racial bias.

"I'm proud of the work we've done," said Schluchter. "A lot of passionate, focused people deserve the credit."

—Dan Heilman

Alice Silkey

MITCHELL HAMLINE SCHOOL OF LAW

Alice Silkey has been a dedicated champion of diversity and equality in the legal profession since beginning her career in 1986, in what was then largely a male-dominated profession.

As a child growing up in Highland Park, Illinois, she aspired to be an attorney and teacher, inspired by her father, who practiced law until the age of 95.

After graduating from the William Mitchell College of Law, Silkey was in solo practice for about six years. In 1988 she also started her teaching career, as an adjunct legal writing professor at William Mitchell College of Law for five years. During that time she also was a part-time teacher of legal writing at Hamline University School of Law. She eventually became a full-time professor at Hamline, teaching there for 25 years. Now an emerita professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, Silkey describes herself as “a teacher at heart.”

Throughout her career, Silkey has been dedicated to promoting diversity in the legal profession. “I can think of no calling more important or more urgent than advocating for diversity, equity and inclusion to promote justice and equality in our society.”

She has been integrally involved in strategic planning for the MSBA’s Diversity and Inclusion Council. She serves on the MSBA Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Council, which she has chaired/co-chaired for the past two years.

She also serves on the MSBA Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Section Council, and is 2021-2022 chair. Silkey also serves as chair/co-chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Subcommittee of the ADR Section Council, and as the diversity liaison for the Council.

Silkey said one of her most enjoyable experiences has been her involvement in arranging mentors for the annual Court Camp, a program sponsored by the Federal Bar Association Diversity and Outreach Committees to help high school students to better understand the legal system.

“Court Camp was an eye-opening experience — seeing students — some of whom had experienced less than positive encounters with law enforcement — interacting with judges was eye-opening. We got to know the students as individuals. Mentoring programs like that are essential.”

– Dan Emerson



Brandon Vaughn

ROBINS KAPLAN

When Brandon Vaughn began his career as an attorney in 2008, he had at least one advantage over many of his African American peers. His father, a Chicago attorney who had his own law firm, clued him in on some of the hurdles he might face as a Black attorney in a predominantly white field, and how he could succeed in spite of them.

When he attended law school at the University of Wisconsin, Vaughn's father helped him understand some of the requisites and nuances needed to succeed — “knowing the correct courses to take, understanding how law firms work and how to survive and thrive in a law firm setting that is predominantly white ... how to appropriately study to do well and have requisite credentials to be competitive for some of the premium jobs.”

“Taking courses that help prepare you for passing the bar exam is important, but also being focused on taking courses you are interested in to give you the opportunity to do well. He really encouraged me to take practical courses I would use in my practice, rather than focusing on more academic or theoretical areas; participating in law school clinics where you are working with potential clients or directly with judges, so you can see the law in application.”

Following the death of George Floyd in 2020, Vaughn was instrumental in the firm's establishment of a Black firm member group, to address issues specifically related to African Americans, as well as to increase their representation throughout the firm.

Vaughn is also proud of an initiative he helped found several years ago, along with a number of his African American colleagues from around the country: the Black in Big Law Pipeline. Its purpose is to develop training for Black lawyers at large national firms “to give them the tools to successfully navigate law firm politics and culture, and advance.”

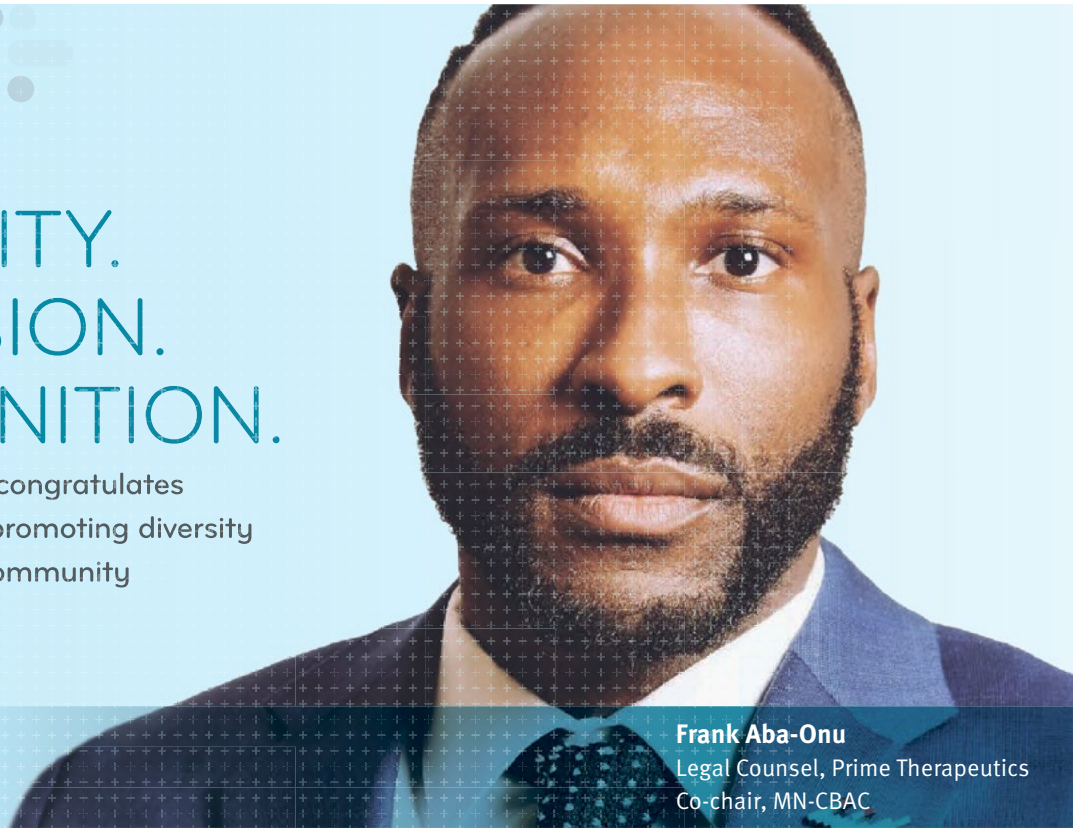
Vaughn has been an active member of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice since 2008, currently serving on the board. He has also been working on a committee with Mitchell Hamline Law School to develop a pipeline program with minority and first generation college students to explore careers in law, the Gateway Program.

—Dan Emerson



DIVERSITY. INCLUSION. RECOGNITION.

Prime Therapeutics congratulates
Frank Aba-Onu for promoting diversity
at work and in our community



Frank Aba-Onu
Legal Counsel, Prime Therapeutics
Co-chair, MN-CBAC

Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Council would like to recognize **Frank Aba-Onu** as one of the minority affinity bar leaders who came together to create the Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color (MN-CBAC). Frank also serves as one of the co-chairs of MN-CBAC.

MN-CBAC's purpose is to advance issues of common interest and concern; provide mutual support and professional development; and collectively improve the legal profession and access to justice in Minnesota. The organization was created in 2020 by the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association, Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL), the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association and the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

In addition to his role as legal counsel at Prime, Frank is also president of MABL and an advisor to Prime's D&I Council. Founded in 2019, the D&I council is staffed by Prime employees and drives awareness, initiatives, communication, outreach and events that promote diversity and inclusion.



Judge Sophia Y. Vuelo

RAMSEY COUNTY COURTS

Ramsey County Judge Judge Sophia Y. Vuelo is all about breaking boundaries — and solving problems. The native of Laos was born Yeu Vu, but growing up in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, her name was frequently mispronounced, so she changed it to Sophia. Then, when she married, she legally combined her surname with her husband's to become Vuelo.

Appointed by Gov. Mark Dayton in 2017, Vuelo became the first female Hmong American judge appointed in the United States, and the first Hmong American of either gender in Minnesota. But when the governor's office was preparing to announce her appointment, she asked that they not lead with that fact.

"I've never set out to be the first anything," she said. "I just wanted to be known for doing good work."

Armed with a bachelor's degree in history, Vuelo quickly pivoted to law school. She graduated from Hamline University School of Law in 1998.

"I was always fascinated with how the legal system can impact issues like social justice and really move society forward," she said.

Vuelo eventually founded her own law firm, dealing with juvenile detention, family and criminal cases.

During her career, Vuelo has made a point of enriching the Minnesota legal world however she can. She's an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, an advisory board member of Minnesota Women Lawyers and a mentor at St. Thomas University School of Law.

In the two decades-plus since she earned her law degree, Vuelo said she has seen a lot of progress when it comes to citizens of diverse backgrounds finding a place in the legal world. But she also sees a lot of work yet to be done.

"The legal field is one of the slowest to change when it comes to diversity and gender equity," she said. "But the landscape is always changing."

—Dan Heilman



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Ann Jenrette-Thomas on being recognized as a
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