

Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession Committee

The Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession Committee; chaired by Samuel F. Ford, Kristin Sullivan, and Johnathan Austin; has worked diligently to continue to advance the principles of racial, ethnic, gender, age, and geographic diversity in the profession and the inclusion of all its members. The overall purpose of the Committee is to help increase the level of female and minority membership and participation in the State Bar.

Throughout the year, the committee established three subcommittees to accomplish its goals: (1) Mentorship Subcommittee, (2) ABA Review Subcommittee, and (3) Diversity Outreach Subcommittee. Each subcommittee focused on a specified area in the legal profession where practical and genuine action was taken in an effort to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within the State Bar.

The accomplishments of the Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession Committee included establishing three subcommittees: (1) Mentorship Subcommittee, (2) ABA Review Subcommittee, and (3) Diversity Outreach Subcommittee. We also partnered with the Lawyers in Every Classroom task force and co-hosted an event at Jones Valley Middle School. During our Law Day at Jones Valley Middle School, we hosted a mock trial for the students in order to create a fun and engaging activity that helped foster interest and excitement in the legal field. Our committee also partnered with the Regions Bank Diversity WebEx Series where Birmingham Legal Leaders were able to offer their perspectives from State and Local Bar Associations on Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives. Our committee sponsored Bryan Fair to speak for the Alabama State Bar Annual Meeting where Mr. Fair presented a CLE presentation titled “Still Standing in the Schoolhouse Door: A First Amendment Defense of Critical Race Theory.” Finally, our committee was successful in partnering with Jones School of Law to continue the mentorship program with law students from diverse backgrounds.

During the 2021-2022 term, our committee hosted and sponsored a variety of special events and programs. We partnered with the Lawyers in Every Classroom task force and co-hosted a mock trial event at Jones Valley Middle School. During our Law Day, we created a variety of fun activities for the students in order to help encourage interest and excitement in the legal field. Our committee also partnered with the Regions Bank Diversity WebEx Series where Birmingham Legal Leaders were able to offer their perspectives and the conversation focused largely on determining the importance of DEI issues, addressing DEI issues, limitations within the Bar, setting practical goals, community engagement, social justice stances, and much more. Another particular event that our committee sponsored was Bryan Fair’s CLE presentation titled “Still Standing in the Schoolhouse Door: A First Amendment Defense of Critical Race Theory” for the Alabama State Bar Annual Meeting.

The Mentorship Subcommittee sought to connect law students and young lawyers from diverse backgrounds with members of the Mentorship Subcommittee. Our subcommittee consisted of lawyers at small firms, large firms, and even judges who were eager and ready to serve young lawyers and students. The members of the Mentorship Subcommittee understood that their role was to build one-on-one relationships and to voluntarily give time to teach, support, and encourage their mentees. Mentoring focused on enhancing networking skills, offering opportunities to meet diverse lawyers, assisting in educational, professional, and legal

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careers, and helping students prepare for the Bar Exam. The ultimate goal of the program was for the mentor and the mentee to build a relationship that would exist for longer than one year and beyond the program that established it.

The Mentorship Subcommittee worked directly with Jones School of Law through Dean Charles Campbell. Pairings were established by careful review of both the mentor and the mentee's resume, interests, experiences, and goals for the mentorship relationship. One successful pairing was determined not only by their shared interest in Public Health and Health Law, but also by their personal passion for foreign languages. Once connected through a facilitated meeting, the pair established a strong foundation for their relationship and were equipped with the tools to continue their mentorship program independently. This is just one example of the many successful pairings that were created through this program. Our ultimate goal was to allow successful and engaging lawyers to help equip and lead law students. Our mentees were provided with a skilled and experienced lawyer to go to with questions about deciding their specialty, how to interview, beginning their network, and building practical skills for the legal field. By providing an outlet for mentorship and encouragement for diverse students and young lawyers, our Mentorship Subcommittee was able to implement practical change in an effort to improve diversity and inclusion initiatives for the next generation of lawyers.

Within the ABA Review Subcommittee, the members were tasked with reviewing the ABA Model Plan for Diversity and Inclusion and adopting a plan specific to Alabama. Throughout the year, the subcommittee offered frequent feedback on the ABA plan and ways to create a plan that's specific to Alabama. Currently, the plan is still under review and development. Our goal at the end of this term is to pass on the project to be continued by next year's subcommittee.

The Diversity Outreach Subcommittee partnered with entities such as the Alabama Lawyers Association, Women's Section, Young Lawyer's Section, Lawyers in Every Classroom Task Force, and more to develop programming and CLEs centered around increasing diversity and inclusion initiatives in the legal profession. The members of this subcommittee were responsible for partnering with these entities, programming, and creating events that promoted diversity and inclusion principles within the Bar.

With the assistance of the Outreach Subcommittee, we were able to partner with the Lawyers in Every Classroom Taskforce and co-host 2 events at Jones Valley Middle School. During our events at Jones Valley Middle School, we hosted a mock trial for the students involving our theoretical clients, Kanye West and Taylor Swift. The purpose of our partnership and event with Lawyers in Every Classroom was to introduce students to the legal profession with diverse lawyers and leaders for them to learn from. We aimed to create a fun and engaging activity that helped foster interest and excitement in the legal field from leaders of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

After extensive research and careful planning, the Outreach Subcommittee also selected a speaker, Bryan Fair, and sponsored a CLE presentation titled "Still Standing in the Schoolhouse Door: A First Amendment Defense of Critical Race Theory" for the Alabama State Bar Annual

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Meeting. The subcommittee selected Mr. Fair due to his active involvement in Diversity and Inclusion initiatives. Mr. Fair's presentation focused largely on the constitutional implications of the removal of critical race theory from academia.

Finally, the Outreach Subcommittee also worked with the Regions Bank Diversity WebEx Series where Birmingham Legal Leaders were able to offer their perspectives from State and Local Bar Associations on Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives. During the WebEx series, the conversation focused largely on determining the importance of DEI issues, addressing DEI issues, limitations within the Bar, setting practical goals, community engagement, social justice stances, and much more. Engaging in conversations such as this and offering a diverse perspective helps foster growth, education, and engagement on Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.

Ultimately, the 2021-2022 Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession Committee was largely successful in not only setting our goals, but working diligently and actively engaging with their roles and subcommittees to achieve them. While there is still more to do to improve racial, ethnic, gender, age, and geographic diversity in the profession and the inclusion of all its members, the 2021-2022 Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession Council is proud of the goals that were set, strived for, and accomplished.