



Monte E. Frank is the 93rd president of the CBA. He is a principal in Cohen and Wolf's Litigation and Municipal Groups, representing business and municipal clients in the state and federal courts in Connecticut on a wide range of matters. He works from the firm's Danbury and Bridgeport offices.

In my penultimate column as your president, I am celebrating the accomplishments of the Connecticut Bar Association to advance diversity and inclusion in the Connecticut legal landscape. And, while I am pleased with our efforts, we have a long way to go. As Robert Frost so aptly said, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep."

When I became Vice President of the CBA in 2014, many were rightfully critical of the association's lack of diversity and inclusion. While there were some faint conversations occurring, there was very little focus and almost no action. Sadly, the CBA did not even have a diversity and inclusion policy.

At that time, an editorial ran in the Con-

Celebrate Diversity

By Monte E. Frank

necticut Law Tribune lamenting the lack of diversity in the CBA, as demonstrated by the selection of me as Vice President. When I read it, I was angry, not because I thought the author was wrong (he wasn't), but because the author judged me without knowing me.

What the author did not know was that I had just emerged from a year following the Sandy Hook School shooting during which my eyes were opened to gun violence on our city streets, and the biases that go with it. One moment of clarity occurred at an event I spoke at in Harlem earlier that year. Jumaane Williams, a New York City councilman representing Flatbush in Brooklyn, looked at me and said he understood the pain of the families of Newtown and that it was a "terrible thing." Then he queried why it is that when a shooting occurs in the suburbs, people assume it's a mental health issue, but when it happens in Harlem or Bedford Stuyvesant, people say, look at those "animals." I had similar conversations with Rev. Sam Saylor of Springfield, Rev. Henry Brown of Hartford, Pastor Vernon Williams of Harlem, and so many others. One such conversation took place while sitting around a table for hours in a Holiday Inn

Express meeting room in Washington, D.C., talking openly with African American leaders about gun violence and race.

Of course, the author of the Connecticut Law Tribune's take down of the CBA, and me, did not know any of this. He also did not realize that he lit a fuse in me to use my position as a leader in the CBA to move the needle. And, in doing so I have met, worked with, and become friends with, some amazing people who have challenged me in so many ways. They have worked effectively and diligently to not only advance diversity and inclusion in the legal community, but to advance the legal profession as a whole.

The work of the CBA, led by its Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which I have co-chaired with Cecil Thomas and Maggie Castinado, has been extraordinary. Here are some of the highlights:

- On March 23, 2015, the House of Delegates unanimously approved a diversity and inclusion policy, which states, "The Connecticut Bar Association is committed to diversity in its membership, officers, staff, House of Delegates, Board of Governors, executive committee, sections and committees, and their respective leaders. Diversity is an

inclusive concept encompassing gender, gender identity, race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, and disability.

We are a richer and more effective association because of diversity, as it increases our association's strengths, capabilities, and adaptability. Through increased diversity, our organization can more effectively address member and societal needs with the varied perspectives, experiences, knowledge, information, and understanding inherent in a diverse relationship."

- Guided by the policy, the CBA adopted a Diversity and Inclusion Plan with the ultimate goal of fostering a genuine, sustainable diverse and inclusive environment within the association, throughout its membership, and the Connecticut legal community. The plan can be found at ctbar.org/Diversity.
- The committee developed a Diversity and Inclusion Template, which is being pushed out to all of the CBA's sections and committees. Many have already adopted plans and are implementing them. The template can be found at ctbar.org/Diversity.
- The CBA developed and led the first Diversity and Inclusion Summit on October 26, 2016 at Quinnipiac University School of Law. Assistant Attorney General Christine Jean-Louis led this effort with support from the committee.
- As a result of the summit, 25 law firms, corporations, and other entities have already become signatories to the Pledge and Plan. You may view the signatories at ctbar.org/PledgeAndPlan. New signatories are welcome.
- The signatories have met twice and are preparing for the 2017 summit to be held again at Quinnipiac University School of Law on October 25, 2017.
- As CBA president, I endorsed American Bar Association Resolution 113 and the General Counsel Pledge. For more information, visit ctbar.org/Resolution113.
- The CBA initiated and led the effort to pass Resolution 10B concerning refugees and asylum seek-

ers at the ABA Mid-Year meeting in Miami. For more information, visit ctbar.org/Resolution10B.

- On April 20, 2017, the CBA and the Connecticut Bar Foundation co-sponsored a diversity symposium at UConn School of Law. Several people who were originally skeptical of the CBA's commitment to diversity, led discussions.
- The CBA has developed a survey for its leadership to provide a benchmark, so we can assess the effectiveness of our efforts as we move forward.
- President-elect Karen DeMeola has launched a pipeline program called Pathways to Legal Careers: An Access and Opportunity Pipeline Program. Pathways is designed to provide insight about law and the legal profession to high school students with the hope of encouraging talented and diverse students to consider a legal career.

We have worked hard to make diversity and inclusion part of the fabric of the CBA. To take us to the next level, we will be hiring a Chief Diversity Officer at the association, whose job will be to direct the implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion Plan and the goals of the summit's Pledge and Plan, and to coordinate efforts with our many partners, including Lawyers Collaborative for Diversity and the Affinity Bar Associations.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank President-elect Karen DeMeola, Cecil Thomas, and Christine Jean-Louis for trusting me and for their incredible leadership, tireless work, and friendship. We have had anything but an "echo chamber" and as a result, we have made better decisions and positioned the CBA to drive diversity and inclusion to new heights. Indeed, we have come a long way and we should be proud, but we have miles to go before we sleep, miles to go before we sleep. **CL**

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