



# Second Annual Diversity & Inclusion Summit

By Leanna Zwiebel

On October 25, leaders in the legal profession, along with members of the CBA Diversity and Inclusion Summit Committee, gathered at Quinnipiac University School of Law for the second annual Connecticut Diversity & Inclusion Summit: The Collaborative Blueprint, to learn about available tools to make Connecticut a more diverse and inclusive bar.

Statistics show that the legal profession faces unique challenges in terms of diversity and inclusion. "The challenge is... [t]he system we rely on in admitting, hiring, and sponsoring attorneys relies on an assumption that everything is equal, when we know it is not," stated CBA President and Diversity and Inclusion Committee Co-chair Karen DeMeola.



Retired State Supreme Court Justice Lubbie Harper, Jr. and CBA Immediate Past President Monte E. Frank interacting during the event workshop.

At this sold-out event, through a workshop and discussions, attendees learned how implicit bias impacts the workplace and the methods used toward a successful change, how organizations should rethink diversity and inclusion training, and gained the necessary tools to create a concrete training plan to support diversity and inclusion within their organizations.

"As a result of the summit, the pledge and plan, and the work of law firms, in-house departments, government law departments, law schools, Lawyers Collaborative for Diversity, the Connecticut Bar Foundation, the affinity bars, and so many others,



(L to R) Diversity and Inclusion Summit Committee members Alix Simonetti and Neeta Vatti; Summit Committee Chair Christine Jean-Louis; event speaker Dr. Arin Reeves; President Karen DeMeola; Summit Committee member Cherie Phoenix-Sharpe; Diversity and Inclusion Committee Co-chair Cecil Thomas; Immediate Past President Monte E. Frank, and President-elect Jonathan Shapiro.

I believe Connecticut is on its way to becoming a leader in diversity and inclusion," said CBA Immediate Past President Monte E. Frank.

Dr. Arin Reeves, a leading researcher, author, and advisor in the field of diversity and inclusion, presented an innovative workshop that gave attendees the tools for their organizations to help them move toward measurable success in their diversity and inclusion goals.

The event's keynote speaker, vice president and chief legal officer of the Association of Corporate Counsel in Washington, DC, James Merklinger, discussed biases regarding disabilities in the legal profession illustrated by his own experiences with Tourette Syndrome, sharing that his tics from this disorder have gotten him thrown off a plane and fired.

Cecil J. Thomas, Diversity & Inclusion Committee co-chair, presented the goals of the CBA's collaborative pledge and plan, and discussed recent progress from last year with the signatories of the pledge. The Diversity & Inclusion Pledge & Plan reflects a reaffirmation of the legal profession's commitment to approaching diversity and inclusion strategically, collaboratively, and



CBA President Karen DeMeola welcomes Diversity Summit attendees.

with accountability. Twenty-seven organizations have currently signed. More information can be found at [ctbar.org/Pledge-AndPlan](http://ctbar.org/Pledge-AndPlan).

"We are proud of the work of our signatory organizations as they work through this multiyear process, supported by the Connecticut Bar Association Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and look forward to more positive progress in the years ahead," expressed Cecil Thomas. **CL**



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