

News & Events

CBA Hosts Fifth Annual Diversity & Inclusion Summit

On Wednesday, October 21, more than 125 people attended the CBA's fifth annual Diversity & Inclusion Summit: The Collaborative Blueprint. The interactive and engaging virtual Summit explored retention in legal organizations, with a specific focus on understanding the factors that lead diverse attorneys to leave their organizations and the actions organizations can take to not only retain diverse attorneys, but create an environment for them to grow and succeed.

Neeta M. Vatti, co-chair of the CBA's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, began the Summit by explaining the event's significance for not only the Connecticut legal community, but diversity and inclusion work in general. She shared her personal story of coming to the United States with her family, traveling through multiple countries to finally reach the US. Even as a child, she understood that diversity and inclusion issues would remain important for how she navigated life.

The first presentation was by CBA president-elect and Diversity & Inclusion Committee co-chair, Cecil J. Thomas. Similar to years past, President-elect Thomas presented the data from the Connecticut Legal Community's Diversity & Inclusion Pledge & Plan Signatories, which showed an increase in diversity in signatory organizations. Though there is still progress to be made in the hiring and retention of diverse associates, President-elect Thomas noted that the pandemic had changed the course of many firms' diversity and inclusion efforts. Therefore, the signatories would revisit the topic of retention at the following year's Summit. The Diversity & Inclusion Pledge & Plan reflects a reaffirmation of the legal profession's commitment to approaching diversity and inclusion strategically, collaboratively, and with accountability. The Pledge & Plan, along with the 40 organizations that have signed on, may be viewed at ctbar.org/pledgeandplan.

Aleria PBC, a diversity and inclusion firm, delivered the Summit's plenary workshop. The company's co-founders, Paolo Gaudiano and Lisa Magill, presented an interactive workshop,

which focused on the organizational dynamics that create and hinder diversity and inclusion efforts. Aleria used Zoom polls to better understand the diversity of the attendees and their interactions and diverse experiences in their organizations.

Aleria also utilized a simulation to show the effects of discriminatory policies on the retention of diverse employees. The second half of their workshop analyzed personal and organizational environment data provided anonymously by attendees. After, the presenters showed the experiences of the attendees and their interactions with other colleagues in their organizations, highlighting positive experiences and some instances of discrimination. Aleria's key message was that even with programs and initiatives focused on diversity and inclusion, changing the organizational environment and practices was key to retaining diverse attorneys.

The afternoon keynote presentation featured Attorney Sharon Jones of Jones Diversity Inc. and was moderated by Attorney Sandra Yamate of the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession. The keynote address focused on forming and

fostering positive mentor-mentee relations in law firms, challenging both mentors and mentees to take certain action steps to better understand each other and thrive in the organization. The facilitators participated in a candid dialogue sharing personal experiences and suggesting possible courses of action to the attendees.

Thank you to the presenters and Diversity & Inclusion Summit Committee members for organizing an interactive and engaging event and to all of our sponsors, including platinum sponsor Kronholm Insurance Services, gold sponsor Wiggan and Dana, and silvers sponsors Hinkley Allen and Pullman and Comley, for their support.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION SUMMIT



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CBA MEMBERS HELP CT RESIDENTS EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE

More than 175 CBA members helped Connecticut residents exercise their constitutional right to vote this past fall through the Secretary Legal Assistance Program in partnership with the Office of the Secretary of the State Denise W. Merrill. Attorneys were on call to respond to issues at the polls, serve as an objective source of information, report back to the Secretary of the State, and communicate her directives.

“Volunteer attorneys stood at the ready on Election Day from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. until the polls closed and the last person in line had voted. We objectively assessed voting situations or inconsistencies brought to us by the Secretary of the State’s office, reported back, and resolved issues promptly by communicating Secretary Merrill’s directives to the voting moderator,” said CBA President Amy Lin Meyerson. “We were grateful for these opportunities to defend democracy and

protect the rule of law and were dedicated in assisting Secretary Merrill and the Secretary of the State’s Office to safeguard the integrity of our elections and ensure that the ballot of every registered Connecticut voter was counted.”

Volunteers responded to a handful of incidents on Election Day.

Prior to Election Day, the Young Lawyers Section (YLS) implemented a virtual voter registration drive on their social media channels. Beginning in September, each week, they informed their followers on how to check their voter registration status, register to vote, apply for and return absentee ballots, make a plan to vote on Election Day, register to vote on Election Day, and provided a reminder to vote. They created original videos and shared photos of themselves completing their civic duty.

“The YLS was happy to help encourage others to exercise one of their most important civic duties. While we as lawyers might be accustomed to getting out on Election Day and more keenly aware of the importance of exercising the right to vote, we recognized that there are others that are not, and focused on spreading information about voting to our non-lawyer networks,” said YLS Public Service Co-Director Kyle McClain. “Thank you to everyone that ‘liked’ and ‘shared’ our posts and special thanks go to Jermaine Brookshire, Jr. and my public service co-director, Alison Toumekian, for getting in front of the camera and generating enthusiasm for the cause with their videos!”



CBA Pro Bono Clinics Go Virtual

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic did not prevent more than 25 attorneys and paralegals from volunteering at the CBA’s Pro Bono Clinics held virtually during the National Celebration of Pro Bono Week, October 25 through November 1, 2020.

Throughout the three-day event, more than 50 clients received pro bono services in Zoom breakout rooms. The volunteer paralegals provided telephonic intakes prior to the event. On the days of the clinic, the volunteer attorneys provided free legal advice in a range of practice areas, including consumer law, employee rights/unemployment, immigration law, landlord/tenant, family law, tax law, bankruptcy, and pardons.

“Despite the pandemic and technology challenges, the Connecticut Bar Association was pleased to provide our virtual free legal clinics during National Pro Bono Week,” said CBA President Amy Lin Meyerson. “Through the provision of pro bono services, the CBA continues to work diligently to get legal help to those in need and to narrow the access to justice gap. We also staunchly support our members who have the passion for public service and for the protection of our human and civil rights.”

Thank you to all of those who volunteered at this important community event.

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Young Lawyers Hike Ragged Mountain



Members of the YLS hiked Ragged Mountain, in Berlin, on a beautiful fall day.

The Young Lawyers Section (YLS) organized a hike on Ragged Mountain on Saturday, October 24. More than 25 members signed up to get outside, completed a 5.5-mile loop, and networked with their peers at their only in-person event of the fall.

“The event was a perfect opportunity to achieve networking, social, and wellness goals,” said YLS Membership Co-Director Jonathan E. Friedler. “YLS members met at Ragged Mountain in Berlin, Connecticut to traverse the Blue and Red Blazed Loop Trail on a beautiful fall morning.”

The YLS held multiple virtual networking events, including a trivia night and their annual holiday party, during fall 2020.

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CBA Sections Support Food Donation Organizations

The Workers' Compensation and Young Lawyers Sections' annual events raised nearly \$13,000 for Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare at a time when the number of food insecure Connecticut residents is on the rise, as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

The Workers' Compensation Section's 22nd Annual Verrilli-Belkin Workers' Compensation Charity Golf Event, held on September 17, raised more than \$9,500 for Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare.

The Young Lawyers Section's annual Horn of Plenty Food Drive collected over \$3,300 in monetary donations for Foodshare during their two-week virtual food drive.

These donations resulted in approximately 32,260 meals for Connecticut residents who rely on food assistance this past holiday season.

TEN MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN YEAR-LONG LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Ten CBA members were a part of the inaugural class of the Connecticut Professionals' Leadership Academy for emerging leaders. Members of the CBA, along with the Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants, Hartford County Bar Association, CFA Society Hartford, Connecticut Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and Connecticut Young Insurance Professionals, participated in the year-long development program to strengthened leadership skills, build relationships, cultivate talent, and create a collaborative community among several professions. Jeremy L. Brown, Cindy M. Cieslak, Carrie M. Coulombe, Aigné S. Goldsby, Cody N. Guarnieri, Kaitlin M. Humble, Karissa L. Parker, Kimberly T. Smith, Meghan E. Smith, and Matthew K. Stiles represented the CBA in this program. ■

Thank You to the 2020-2021 1875 Society Members for All of Your Support

The 1875 Society, aptly named for the Connecticut Bar Association's (CBA) founding on June 2, 1875, is a group of members committed to sustaining the CBA and the legal profession in Connecticut. The society's financial donation supports the delivery of essential programs for members and the public, and enables the CBA to maintain its high standards for ethics, professionalism, and civility; advance the effective administration of justice; and build diversity and inclusion in the legal community.

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Join a growing group of leaders in the CBA who have joined the 1875 Society by contacting our Member Service Center at (844)469-2221 or msc@ctbar.org.