

# CBA Future of the Legal Profession Scholars Program

By SALIHAH R. DENMAN

**D**iversity, Equity and Inclusion in the legal field is needed to ensure effective legal representation and equitable outcomes in judicial decisions. Jurists and attorneys should reflect the communities they seek to serve. The goal of achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession is one with many challenges and requires a multi-faceted approach. The call has been answered by local, state, and national bar associations, as well as law schools. The Connecticut Bar Association, through its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has created programming to answer the call to aid in achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession. One of the programs instituted by the DEI Committee is the CBA Future of the Legal Profession Scholars Program. The program was created in 2020 by the Committee and Diversity Pledge signatories. The target audience for the program is college juniors and seniors, or recent college graduates. In 2022, the program had its biggest cohort to date with a total of ten scholars being admitted.

The CBA Future of the Legal Profession Scholars Program provides students in Connecticut with funds to take LSAT preparation classes that many of its recipients would be unable to access otherwise. In addition to funding LSAT preparation, the program also creates and implements programming to provide the scholars with information they may not otherwise have access to. In 2023, the program has been off to a great start. On January 24, the program host-



Salihah R. Denman

ed a career panel. The Hon. Carletha Parkinson of the Connecticut Superior Court; Leander Dolphin, managing partner at Shipman & Goodwin; Jeff Gentes, managing attorney, Fair Lending and Foreclosure Prevention Project; Gideon Asemnor, an associate at Carmody Torrance Sandak Hennessey LLP; and Ginny Kim, assistant general counsel and chief compliance officer for the State of Connecticut Office of the Treasurer served as panelists. The scholars were engaged in the program and benefited from the panelists' words of wisdom.

The Legal Scholars program has continuously provided the scholars with robust programming to aid them on their journeys to law school. Past programs

have included such diverse topics as: how to prepare a law school application, a law school student and alumni panel, and professional etiquette tips. The program has had a successful impact on the legal scholars, one of whom has recently secured a judicial clerkship. Alumni of the program have attended law schools in Connecticut and beyond, including the University of Connecticut School of Law, Quinnipiac School of Law, New England Law School, and Georgetown Law Center. In addition to the scholarships and programs offered, the DEI committee members continue to serve as a resource for the scholars throughout their law school experience.

I have had the privilege and honor of taking over as chair of the Scholars Program Committee this bar year. As a first-generation immigrant to the United States from Suriname, South America, I was, and still am, the first in my family to go to law school here. Learning to navigate the law school application process and then law school itself was a challenge. I did not know any attorneys or judges to guide me in the process. There were few, if any, resources at the time to help people in my position. After plenty of hard work and struggle, I was admitted to and attended Howard University School of Law where the professors were dedicated to our success and helped to bridge the gap. At Howard Law, I accepted the law school's call to become a "social engineer." One of the first things students at Howard Law learn is a charge to all of the law school's students and alumni from our former



Image credit: Klaus Vedfelt / Digital Vision Getty Images

dean, Charles Hamilton Houston. Dean Houston once said, “A lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society.” It is both humbling and rewarding to play my part in ensuring that diversity in the law is achieved through the Legal Scholars program, my work as a professor at New York Law School, and my roles as the director of the New York Legal Educational Opportunity program and director of student diversity initiatives at the New York State Judicial Institute.

Many students that are from groups that are not traditionally represented in the legal field and/or are the first generation in their family to attend college and/or law school are at a disadvantage when competing with their peers. Pipeline programming fills the gap for those students. They are an important tool for

ensuring diversity in the bench and bar. Pipeline programs in the legal arena focus on providing students from these groups with the tools they need for academic and career success. The programs serve as a bridge for students who do not have a judge or lawyer, they can call upon to give them advice on how to best prepare for the LSAT, which courses to take to pass the bar, or how to prepare a competitive job application. It is through programs like the CBA Future of the Legal Profession Scholars Program that diversity, equity, and inclusion will truly be achieved. ■

*Salimah R. Denman is an assistant professor at New York Law School and serves as the director of the New York Legal Educational Opportunity program and director of student diversity initiatives at the New York State Judicial Institute. Attorney Denman is the chair of the CBA Legal Scholars Program Committee this bar year.*

## DIVERSITY EQUITY & INCLUSION



### Become a Connecticut Legal Community Diversity & Inclusion Pledge and Plan Signatory

The pledge and plan is a multi-year commitment to enhancing diversity and inclusion in legal organizations, with different focuses each year to help signatories attain their diversity and inclusion goals.

Sign up for the pledge and plan at [ctbar.org/pledge](http://ctbar.org/pledge).