

CBA Hosts First In-Person Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Summit Since 2019



After three years of virtual events, the Connecticut Bar Association's eighth Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Summit returned in person on October 20. Over 150 members of the Connecticut legal community gathered at the University of Connecticut School of Law's Starr Reading Room to hear from a variety of speakers, who discussed strategies for creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments within legal organizations and within the broader Connecticut legal community.

Each year, the summit serves as an opportunity for the signatory organizations to the **Connecticut Legal Community Diversity & Inclusion Pledge and Plan** to gather for a day of learning, reflection, and inspiration. The current Pledge and Plan provides a series of organizational diversity and inclusion action steps and best practices for each signatory organization to implement during the year. The organizational signatories then gather at the summit each year to review their efforts and progress, and receive educa-

(L to R) CBA Immediate Past President Daniel J. Horgan; Joshua R. Goodbaum; Past CBA President and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Co-Chair Hon. Cecil J. Thomas; Dr. Robert W. Livingston; CBA Past President Monte E. Frank; Alexis H. Smith; CBA Vice President Emily A. Gianquinto; and Troy Brown.

tion focused on the future goals of the Summit. Since the launch of the Pledge and Plan in October 2016, 43 Connecticut legal organizations, including private law firms, government legal agen-



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– DR. ROBERT W. LIVINGSTON

cies, non-profit law firms, and corporate legal departments now participate in the effort.

CBA Vice President Emily A. Gianquinto welcomed those attending the summit for the first time and thanked those who have returned year after year for their support. "The summit is the Connecticut legal community's opportunity to come together to learn and discuss strategies for increasing diversity and for creating and maintaining inclusive environments in all of our organizations," stated Vice President Gianquinto.

The Hon. Cecil J. Thomas, co-chair of the CBA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and chair of the 2023 Summit Committee, opened the event with the annual diversity metrics presentation. This presentation, which has been given at the summit each year since 2017, provides an aggregate snapshot of the representation of diverse individuals within the signatory organizations, organized by type of employer. The data is drawn from assessment responses that the Connecticut Legal Community's Diversity & Inclusion Pledge & Plan Signatories submit annually, in which each organization describes its structural diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts during the prior year, and shares demographic data concerning lawyers employed within the organization in Connecticut. The presentation provided information on diversity metrics organized by gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability, for private, non-profit, and government legal agency pledge signatories. Summit participants were provided insight into the representation of diverse individuals within the leadership and total attorney population of these legal sectors, trends, and changes over the past five years of data collection in Connecticut, and comparisons to national trends as reported by the National Association of Law Placement.

Summit keynote speaker and Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Chair Dr. Robert W. Livingston presented the program "How to Promote Racial Equity in the



Workplace and Society," during which he explored the contrast between people's perceptions of racism and the reality of racism, the concept of unconscious bias, and strategies that individuals and organizations can adopt to improve racial equity. Dr. Livingston noted that "Racism is not an individual problem, it is a systemic problem... If you only focus on individuals without addressing the system, it's akin to treating the symptoms without curing the disease itself." He explained that it is necessary to undertake an in-depth analysis of the systemic nature of racism to begin resolving the issues surrounding it.

During several portions of his presentation, Dr. Livingston invited the audience to participate and respond to the topics he raised through group discussions between attendees at their tables. He noted that studies show that conversations that elicit moderate levels of discomfort result in the highest levels of learning among participants and he encouraged those present to participate in difficult conversations regarding race and challenge their preconceptions through doing so. "If you're having honest, fact-based conversations about race, there's a good chance that you will learn something that contradicts something you already believe," stated Dr. Livingston.

The final program of the summit, "The State of the Connecticut Legal Communi-

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ty's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Journey," was presented by a panel consisting of Connecticut Superior Court judge and CBA past president, Hon. Karen L. DeMeola; Connecticut Judicial Branch Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Troy Brown; Garrison Levin-Epstein Fitzgerald & Pirrotti PC Partner Joshua R. Goodbaum; and New Haven Legal Assistance Association Director Alexis H. Smith moderated by CBA Past President Monte E. Frank.

CBA Immediate Past President Daniel J. Horgan provided the closing remarks for the summit. "This summit and summits in the past remind us that we have much more work to do and that DE&I is a continuous process that requires commitment and action from everyone in our association," stated Horgan.

The summit reflects the significant efforts of the CBA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and in particular its Summit Subcommittee, over the course of the past year. The CBA extends its gratitude to the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Summit Committee members for organizing an engaging summit and to all our sponsors for making this year's event possible. ■