

# Within the Connecticut Judicial Branch and Beyond, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter

BY THE HON. ELIZABETH A. BOZZUTO

**A**S THE NEW YEAR UNFOLDS, it typically is a time for the Judicial Branch to assess its goals and reflect on ways to further enhance the good work that our judges and staff do to serve the public and the Bar. Creating and sustaining a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization has been at the top of that list for many years, and 2024 is no different.

More than ever, our courts must visibly mirror Connecticut's many diverse communities. Our courts also must eliminate barriers to access, and therein pave the way toward inclusion and equity. The impact of such positive momentum is obvious internally, yet its reach extends far beyond to our many stakeholders.

The Judicial Branch's path toward diversity, equity, and inclusion dates back to 1996, when then-Chief Justice Ellen A. Peters appointed a Judicial Branch Task Force on Minority Fairness, which confirmed that both real and perceived racial and ethnic biases existed in our state judicial system. The report also concluded that minorities and non-minorities had profoundly different views and perceptions of the court system. As a result of its work, the task force recommended that "comprehensive, mandatory cultural sensitivity education and training initiatives should be available for all Judicial Branch personnel at all levels of the system."

The important work of Chief Justice Peters and the task force sustained through the decades and was expanded and fortified when the Honorable Chase T. Rogers

became chief justice. Chief Justice Rogers developed a long-term strategic plan for the Judicial Branch through a newly created Public Service and Trust Commission. And through that process, the commission, in 2008, released several specific outcome goals, which included the following directive: "The Judicial Branch will provide a diverse and culturally competent environment that is sensitive to the values and responsive to the needs of all who interact with it."

The commitment to this goal was an important step in the Judicial Branch's continued progress toward achieving a more robust model of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It led to the creation of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency in 2009, a strong cultural competency training program, and the creation of the Judicial Branch's successful Diversity Week.

Our most recent Diversity Week event occurred this past October when we celebrated its 10th anniversary. Given the occasion, it made perfect sense to have Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson—Connecticut's first Black Chief Justice—as our Opening Day keynote speaker.



Many of you who know Chief Justice Robinson know his commitment to making the Connecticut state court system a model for other states, especially when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. He brings so much to the table—his own experience as a Black man in the legal profession, his tenure as the first chair of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency, his groundbreaking work toward eradicating racial bias from the jury selection process in Connecticut, and his national reputation as a leader in diversity training, to name just a few. His goal for the Branch is succinct: to have a Judicial Branch that is respectful, sensitive, and culturally competent.

Chief Justice Robinson also believes strongly that more can—and must—be



done. Thus, the Judicial Branch took another step forward last year, with the creation of its first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Unit.

We can credit the Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency for its recommendation a few years ago to create such a unit. Subsequently, and with Chief Justice Robinson's full support, we worked with the National Center for State Courts to develop a job description for a new director to lead the office. The Connecticut Supreme Court followed up when it approved the proposal to create the DEI Unit and hire a director, a position for which Troy M. Brown, a longtime Judicial Branch employee, was selected following a broad search, screening, and interviews.

Under Director Brown's leadership, the DEI Unit is responsible for the development, advancement, implementation, and analysis of existing and new DEI activities, such as training, consultation, policy administration, data collection and reporting, and strategic planning. It is dedicated to:

- ▶ Building capacity around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, improving social communication across differences and establishing inclusive policies and procedures.
- ▶ Developing best practices for building diversity and inclusion in the Judicial Branch's workforce and its services.
- ▶ Tracking and measuring equity and inclusion efforts.

Director Brown also plans to interact with external stakeholders. Moreover, as an expert in cultural competency training, he is available to consult with law firms about DEI training. I would urge those of you in private practice to feel free to contact Director Brown at [Troy.Brown@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Troy.Brown@jud.ct.gov).

As the Chief Justice noted in his remarks in October, DEI is about respect. It is about respecting individuals for who they are and where they come from. We owe it to our employees and those whom we serve to continue looking for ways to remove barriers and enhance our diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. The Judicial Branch is committed to ensuring that we meet the challenge. ■

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