

The George W. Crawford Black Bar Association: Achieving Collective Outcomes through a Focus on Equity and Justice in Connecticut's Legal Profession

By MALLORI D. THOMPSON

The George W. Crawford Black Bar Association—known affectionately as “Crawford”—represents the collective body of Black attorneys, judges, and law students in the state of Connecticut. Crawford began as “The Greater Hartford Black Law Society” and had a primary purpose of increasing the number of Black attorneys in Connecticut. After its formation, Crawford quickly expanded its purpose to include activism, namely providing case notes and opinions on seminal civil rights cases—such as *Washington v. Davis*, 426 U.S. 229 (1976) and *California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)—and organizing reactions to important legal and political issues facing the Black community, particularly racial violence.

From Crawford’s first president, Joseph A. Moniz, to myself, the core of Crawford’s charge remains the same—to increase the number and enhance the role of Black attorneys and judges in Connecticut and to focus on legal, political, and social issues affecting the Black community. This remains the core of Crawford’s mission because, despite tremendous advancements, there is still much progress to be made towards equity



and justice in Connecticut and its legal profession.

Although the road toward actualizing Crawford’s mission is long, the strides that leaders in Connecticut’s legal profession have made towards racial equity have proved that prioritizing justice for minoritized communities is in the best interest of us all.

In September, we witnessed the term of Connecticut’s first Black chief justice come to a close. Chief Justice Robinson’s service as the leader of the judicial branch was marked by an unyielding commitment to fairness and justice while upholding the rule of law. This was evidenced by his carefully and thoroughly drafted opinions navigating the state’s most challenging issues, including decisions such as *State v.*

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Holmes, 334 Conn. 202 (2019), which created a task force to address the effects of implicit bias and disparate impact in jury selection and to promote the selection of diverse jury panels in Connecticut's courthouses. Additionally, Chief Justice Robinson's role in overseeing Civics Academy, a program that delivers civics education to elementary-aged students, underscored the importance of engaging students early in their academic careers to sustain our democracy and the rule of law long after our time in this profession has ended. Finally, Chief Justice Robinson had a national presence in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, as he travelled often to provide programming on navigating implicit and unconscious biases. One of Chief Justice Robinson's programs included a message that summarizes his service as chief justice—that leaders should be at the forefront of change.

Chief Justice Robinson stood at the forefront of change throughout his entire career, and as a result, all of us in this profession and in this state are better off. He is one example of how this

state thrives when we embrace the idea that the best person for the job may look different than their predecessors. This is the underpinning of Crawford's current objective, which is to continue improving this state by providing resources for our members to succeed—through academic success programs for law students and professional development programs for attorneys—and by showing the legal profession all our members have to offer.

Crawford members are serving in the highest roles in Connecticut's firms, including on managing committees, as managing partners, as partners-in-charge, and more.

Since this bar year began in June, Crawford has held two events serving this purpose. The first event, planned by Crawford's Political Involvement Committee chair, Bryce Simmons, gathered the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association and Crawford with the Connecticut Legislative Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to discuss issues affecting the Black and Hispanic communities, as well as to discuss navigating the judicial selection process in order to increase the number of Black and Hispanic judges in Connecticut. Aside from representation in the legal system, Crawford believes that a judiciary that represents the breadth of experiences of the people it serves is a fairer and more just judiciary.

The second event, planned by Crawford's Professional Development and Entrepreneurship Committee chair, Kar-

rol-Ann Brown, and hosted by Shipman & Goodwin LLP, gathered Black partners in private practice to provide guidance to associates and law students on navigating the path to partnership as a Black attorney. Crawford members are serving in the highest roles in Connecticut's firms, including on managing committees, as managing partners, as partners-in-charge, and more. There are some firms, however, still working towards electing a single Black attorney

to their partnerships, making events like these crucial to equipping young Black attorneys with the tools necessary to become partners and to use that power to create a more inclusive environment for the next generation.

Crawford has hundreds of immensely talented members with various experiences both outside of this profession and within it. Calling on Crawford's distinguished members to serve in leadership positions throughout the profession has served this state well, and we urge Connecticut's leaders to continue in their noteworthy strides to diversify the profession in the effort to create better outcomes for everyone in this state. ■



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