

Celebrating Ten Years of the CBA Presidential Fellows Program

Apply for the CBA Presidential Fellows Program

By YAMUNA (YAM) MENON

2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the Connecticut Bar Association's Presidential Fellows Program. Launched in 2015, the program was created with the objective of identifying young lawyers who demonstrate leadership potential to assist them in developing their leadership skills and enhancing their involvement in a CBA section. These prestigious two-year appointments are the result of a competitive application process that occurs annually in the early fall, following the submission of all applications in the summer.

Many of the past Fellows have gone on to hold CBA leadership positions, as well as other prestigious leadership positions in the legal community at large, including appointments to the Superior Court and as a Workers' Compensation Commission administrative law judge. A member of the first class of Fellows, Emily Gianquinto, will become President of the CBA for the 2025 – 2026 bar year, marking the first time that a former Fellow will ascend to the highest leadership post of the CBA.

The Presidential Fellows Committee seeks to promote the active involvement

of talented lawyers in the leadership and activities of CBA sections. The program aims to serve as a bridge between the Young Lawyers Section and the other sections and to otherwise connect lawyers who have been practicing law for 12 years or less with opportunities for leadership development. Each Fellow is matched with a CBA section that aligns with their interests or practice areas. The Fellows serve as ex-officio members of the section executive committees and work with section leaders on projects or programs or take on liaison roles in order to make the experience more meaningful.



(L to R) 2023-2025 CBA presidential fellows Emilio A. Estrella, Aaron Arias, and Miriam E. Hasbun; 2024-2026 presidential fellows Danielle A. Erickson, Kara Newell, and Jasjeet Sahani; 2023-2025 presidential fellow Tamara J. Titre; and 2024-2026 presidential fellows Benjamin B. Pahlke and Chelsea Donaldson.

The program welcomed five new Fellows in the fall of 2024 as part of the 2024 - 2026 class, bringing a wide range of backgrounds and experiences to the Presidential Fellows Program:



Chelsea Donaldson,
Connecticut Veterans Legal Center



Danielle A. Erickson,
Pullman & Comley LLC



Kara Newell,
Gfeller Laurie LLP



Benjamin B. Pahlke,
Bona Fide Law LLC



Jasjeet Sahani,
Saxe Doernberger & Vita PC

The appointment introduces each Fellow to attorneys who are already actively involved in bar leadership not only through the matching sections, but also through programming designed especially for the Fellows. The Committee plans events and activities geared toward the development of leadership skills that are offered to the current overlapping classes of Fellows and alumni of the Fellows program. Programming for this bar year has included a welcome dinner for the new Fellows and panel discussion at the Grassy Hills Country Club in Orange and a Zoom leadership presentation featuring judges who were former Presidential Fellows and discussed their journey to the bench. Fellows will soon participate in a professional development workshop concerning the intergenerational work

environment and an event at the 2025 Connecticut Legal Conference. Current Fellows are encouraged to engage with Past Fellows as well, creating a unique community for all participants. Fellows also enjoy a waiver of all fees for section membership and attendance at section meetings.

Prospective Fellows must complete an application and also submit two (2) letters of recommendation, a resume, and a cover letter describing why the applicant

is interested in becoming a Fellow and how they plan to contribute to the section. Applications are reviewed and considered by the Presidential Fellows Committee each fall.

Yamuna (Yam) Menon is General Counsel/Assistant State Comptroller at the Office of the State Comptroller. For 2024-2025, she is Chair of the Presidential Fellows Committee, Vice Chair of the LGBTQ+ Section, and a member of the DEI Committee and Government & Public Sector Committee.

The 2025 application deadline is August 15, 2025. The application can be found on the CBA website at ctbar.org/Fellows. Questions about the program can be directed to Yam Menon, chair of the Presidential Fellows Committee, at yamuna.menon@gmail.com.