

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
Minorities in the Profession

- History and Highlights of Activities -

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE:

In 1984-85 then President Henry G. Miller of White Plains held two meetings with minority bar leaders to gain perspectives on issues of concern to the minority Bar, the role that the State Bar Association should take in addressing these matters, and means of coordination with minority bar associations where appropriate.

One of the suggestions emanating from these forums was the establishment of a Committee on Minorities in the Profession to aid in addressing these concerns on an ongoing basis. Gail J. Wright of Mt. Vernon and New York City served as its first Chair from 1985-87; subsequently, the Committee was chaired by Henry Fernandez of Albany; Gregory Weston, Anthony Suarez, Jacqueline Berrien, Renaye B. Cuyler and Elizabeth Moore, all of New York City, and most recently by David L. Edmunds of Buffalo.

The Committee welcomes designation of liaisons from Minority Bar Associations and attendance at Committee meetings.

CONFERENCE OF BAR LEADERS:

The NYSBA President and President-Elect have met periodically with the Presidents of Minority Bar Associations in the state and others active in the NYSBA to enhance effectiveness in addressing issues of concern to minority members of the bar, developing ways in which the NYSBA and Minority Bar Associations can coordinate and work together where appropriate, and increasing involvement of minority members in NYSBA activities. These forums were initiated in 1989-90 and were the genesis for the Association's Minority Counsel Project, designed to facilitate referral of legal work by corporations to minority firms, and Minority Hiring Project, to advance hiring of minorities in private practice, as described below. The Conferences were most recently held in 1999.

SCOPE OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES:

Projects were designed to aid the profession, law students, those considering law as a career, and the public. The following are examples of activities conducted by the Committee:

- **Career Development:**

Counsel and Hiring Projects: In 1990, the Executive Committee approved establishment of the Conference's Minority Hiring and Counsel Pilot Projects as Association programs with the Committee on Minorities in the Profession to implement and administer the programs. Both projects concluded in 1996 (*see attached articles*). The Counsel Project, to facilitate the referral of legal work from corporations to minority attorneys and firms, became operational in January 1993. The Project involved a limited number of corporate and attorney participants initially in order to maximize its effectiveness and use.

At the January 1994 Annual Meeting, the Committee held a forum of the Project participants to review and discuss the utilization, operation and procedures of the service and consider means of enhancement. Corporate and firm participants in the Counsel Project will meet in late September 1995 for one-on-one meetings and a networking reception to exchange information on corporations' needs for outside counsel and firms' skills and experience in various areas of law.

Regarding the Hiring Project, the Committee works with local bars and minority attorneys in the various urban areas to establish projects to encourage hiring and retention of minority law students and attorneys in the law firms of those communities. This approach was taken in order to tailor the projects to the conditions and needs of the legal communities. The Capital District Black Bar Association, for example, developed a hiring project in the spring of 1995, with the Albany County Bar Association and Albany Law School.

In 1995, the Committee conducted a well-received forum for minority associates on identifying obstacles to retention in private practice to discuss concerns and recommend means of addressing the problems. The session, conducted during the Association Annual Meeting, was attended by approximately 80 associates and is part of the Committee's work to facilitate retention (*see attached article*).

In January 1993, the Committee presented a program in conjunction with the Association Annual Meeting on "Marketing Legal Services to Corporations: Perspectives from Corporations and Minority Law Firms" which featured representatives from the Counsel Project. Other programs focused on rainmaking and client development in 1996, diversity in the workplace in 1997, and minorities and the bar exam in 1998.

Diversity in the Judiciary: The Committee reviewed laws, procedures and developments to aid in promoting diversity in the various courts in the state. The Committee co-sponsored a panel presentation of the Committee on Women in the Law in Albany in November 1993 on "The Road to the Judiciary: Navigating the Judicial Selection Process."

Code of Professional Responsibility: In 1987, this Committee and the Committee on Women in the Law successfully proposed inclusion of specific provisions in the Lawyer's Code of Professional Responsibility concerning discrimination and bias.

Minorities in the Profession Report: In 1986, the Committee endorsed the recommendations of the ABA Task Force on Minorities in the Legal Profession to advance full participation in the profession by minorities and women. The Committee requested and received endorsement by the NYSBA Executive Committee.

- **Projects for Law Students:**

Law Student Liaisons: The Committee is developing a new project to enable minority attorneys to share their experience on career development and other issues with law students. Committee members also have given presentations at various law schools.

BLSA Job Fair: In 1988, Committee members participated in the workshops held during the Black Law Students Association Job Fair in New York.

"Take-A-Chance" Student Intern Program: As part of its efforts in relation to legal education, the Committee developed this project to match law students seeking law clerks positions with law firms and other law offices desiring such assistance. Students and employers completed questionnaires which were matched by need, geographic and other considerations. The appropriate student applications were then directed to the employer with the employer making the selection and arrangements for hiring and compensation. This project operated in 1987-89 and in 1988 involved approximately 70 students.

- **Minority Bar Directory:**

The Committee published a New York State Minority Bar Associations Directory in 1988 to increase awareness and aid in the coordination of the various minority bars.

- **Workshops on Current Legal, Government Issues:**

The Committee, in 1989, presented a series of workshops in conjunction with the Somos Unos Conference in Albany on selection of the judiciary, developing and seeking implementation of legislation, election law procedures, and other topics. Members of the Committee also participated in programs at the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.

- **Public Service:**

Public Information Pamphlets: The Committee produced Spanish translations of the Association's "Know Your Rights" public information pamphlets (Why You Need a Will, Your Rights If Arrested, Your Rights as a Crime Victim, Buying and Selling Real Estate, You and Your Lawyer, AIDS and the Law, Adoption in New York State, Divorce and Separation, Landlords and Tenants).

Community Law Day: This public service program was held in Harlem in 1985 to provide the community with basic information on legal rights and responsibilities in relation to employment. Attendees also had the opportunity for brief consultations with attorneys.

Youth Education: Members give presentations at elementary and secondary schools on law as a career, law and the legal system.

NYSBA ENVIRONMENTAL LAW FELLOWSHIPS:

The Association's Environmental Law Section provides, with the Association of the Bar of the City of New York's environmental committee, a fellowship project for minority law students to work with government environmental units and public interest organizations. Five fellowships were awarded this year.

PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The report of the Association's Special Committee on Public Trust and Confidence in the Legal System included a number of recommendations to address bias and discrimination issues in the justice system. These measures received House of Delegates approval in January 2001. *(Attached is a list of these proposals.)*

THE NEW YORK BAR FOUNDATION GRANTS:

In the early 1990s, The New York Bar Foundation provided grants to the Practicing Law Students (PALS) program for its bar examination tutorial courses for minority law students.

In 1994 and 1995, The Foundation awarded a grant to Attorney Access which facilitates hiring of minority law clerks and attorneys in law firms in western New York.