



## Reaching New Heights - LCLD and West Virginia Climb Together

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For the past four years, the Leadership Council for Legal Diversity ("LCLD"), the West Virginia College of Law and the West Virginia State Bar have partnered with law firms and companies to develop the next generation of diverse legal leaders while working to increase inclusivity in the legal profession in the Mountain State. "It's exciting for West Virginia to be part of something at a national level that has such an impact on the legal profession," says Marilyn McClure-Demers, Vice President, Associate General Counsel at Nationwide

Mutual Insurance Company.

Launched in 2009 by a group of law firm managing partners and corporate general counsel from across the country, LCLD was founded around a very simple idea: the United States would be better served by a truly diverse legal profession, inclusive of all talent. To reach that goal, LCLD's founders committed to use their positions of influence to innovate and expand the pool of diverse legal talent in their organizations and society. Since that time, LCLD has grown nationally to include over 320 corporations and law firms and has produced 10,000 new and diverse "role models" across the country. LCLD has created a number of action-oriented programs designed to develop leadership skills and relationship building at every stage of an attorney's career. These range from Mentoring and 1L Scholars programs for law students, a Pathfinder program for associate-level attorneys, and landmark Fellows and Fellows Alumni programs for partner and senior partner-level participants.

"Our programs have been designed to serve diverse law students and attorneys at key stages of their professional development," says Robert Grey, LCLD's president. "Our goal, ultimately, is to build a legal profession as diverse as the country we serve."

In West Virginia, we have actively embraced LCLD's mission and have progress to show for it. Several law firms are LCLD members, including Bailey & Wyant PLLC, Bowles Rice LLP, Dinsmore & Shohl LLP, Frost Brown Todd LLC, Jackson Kelley PLLC, Nelson Mullins, and Steptoe & Johnson PLLC. Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company, Kroger, Macy's and Mylan Pharmaceuticals have joined as corporate members. "I am honored to be a state leader in West Virginia for the LCLD," says Ashley Pack, partner at Dinsmore & Shohl's Charleston office. "As the demographics of the world are changing, it is increasingly important to have people of all backgrounds providing legal services and at the table making decisions.

Varied backgrounds help attorneys and ultimately the clients we serve consider and understand different perspectives and approaches." As Suleiman Oko-ogua, an LCLD Fellow and partner at Bailey & Wyant, aptly reflects, "LCLD is God-sent. I am so glad that I am able to be part of an organization where I can interact and connect with other unique backgrounds and experiences. I have been able to share common ground with others who have faced the same challenges both past and present that I have."

The mentoring 1L program at the West Virginia College of Law has been particularly successful. The mentoring program serves first-year law students from diverse backgrounds, matching them with mentors from local law firms that provide guidance and strategies for success in law school and beyond. One-on-one mentoring is provided. As the LCLD website notes, "Ask any successful attorney: Nothing propels a legal career like having a great mentor. That's especially true when the mentor is at the top of the profession and takes an active, personal interest in the development of the young lawyer he or she is advising." [www.lclldnet.org](http://www.lclldnet.org).

To date, 38 students have completed the mentoring program at the West Virginia College of Law. Lawyer mentors from across the State have participated, offering their wisdom and sage advice for soon-to-be lawyers. Training for mentors and mentees is conducted so that both parties truly benefit from the mentoring relationship.

In addition to one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring is also part of the program. Group mentoring includes monthly meetings at the College of Law with outside speakers. These speakers have included in-house attorneys from Google, Mercedes-Benz, and Nationwide Insurance, as well as practitioners from across the state. Additionally, each year the program has included a networking session and a panel presentation of influential lawyers in our community. These presentations have covered a variety of areas including networking and relationship building, interviewing skills, professionalism, and finding mentors and sponsors.

Currently, we are gearing up for the 2019 school year and anticipate up to 20 new mentees in the 1L class. "The personal commitment of a practicing lawyer to a law student can have a hugely positive impact on that student's life and career," Dean Bowman said. "When we commit to providing our diverse students with access to mentors, we make a big step forward in our commitment to their current and future success."

Other LCLD programs include attorney leadership development, such as the Fellows and Pathfinders Programs. The Fellows Program identifies high-potential attorneys from diverse backgrounds and sets them on the path to leadership of their organizations. Jill Hall, a partner with Jackson Kelly, notes, "As an LCLD Fellow, I have been fortunate enough to

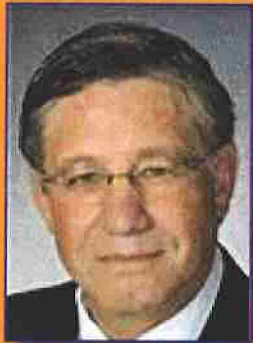


be part of an elite training program designed to set me on a path toward leadership roles within my law firm. I have had the opportunity to network and foster relationships with other diverse and talented lawyers in both private law firm and corporate settings across the country, as well as learn from some of the most engaging panels and guest speakers offering instruction on leadership and professional development. I have also had the pleasure of serving as a mentor to diverse students at the WVU College of Law, and I hope I am playing at least a small role in ensuring these students succeed. I am grateful for all Jackson Kelly and other West Virginia LCLD member organizations are doing to create a pathway to leadership for diverse members of the legal profession in West Virginia." West Virginia Fellows and Fellows Alumni who have completed the program include: Jill Hall (Jackson

Kelly); Suleiman Oko-ogua (Bailey & Wyant); Monte Williams (Steptoe & Johnson); Jared Tully (Frost Brown Todd); Sylvia Winston Nichols (Jackson Kelly); and Ashley Hardesty Odell (Bowles Rice).

The Pathfinders Program, designed for lawyers in the earlier stages of their careers, focuses on developing relationship and foundational leadership skills and an understanding of career development strategies. West Virginia Pathfinders and Pathfinder Alumni who have completed the program include: Asad Khan (Nationwide); Kayla Cook (Bowles Rice); Steven Hall (Bowles Rice); and James "J.L." Leon (Nelson Mullens).

To continue LCLD's mission and develop diverse and inclusive leadership in our State, we must all commit to working hard to continue the path forward.



## A Change of View on Diversity & Inclusion

Thomas E. Scarr, *Past President DTCWV, 2004-2005, and current Vice President of West Virginia State Bar*

Diversity and inclusion have become the watchwords of our time for education, business and law, among other activities and disciplines. In the legal field, currently and over the last few years, diversity and inclusion are subjects discussed at most every legal program and seminar. They are issues of concern of law schools, Bar associations and law firms, and are now significant criterium by which many clients evaluate, judge and select prospective law firms and counsel.

For many of us and for most of our lives, diversity and inclusion have always been accepted as important and "right" core values; everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed in whatever activity and field they choose to pursue. Everyone should be treated equally and fairly. Several years ago when I was being interviewed for a legal position, I was caught off guard by the question: Did I feel diversity was important and why? My first reaction was that for me, I did not give much thought to diversity and inclusion because I didn't focus on peoples differences but instead on our common human characteristics and basic similarities. I had grown beyond such issues as our differences. I supported my reaction and response by noting that I am Jewish, a member of an historic and often persecuted minority. I married a German, Lebanese Catholic woman, a lawyer mind you. I have gay, black, ethnically different, and disabled members of my immediate and extended families, and such differences were never really an issue. To me, diversity and inclusion were natural and right because we were all so much alike, essentially the same, and our few differences were not negatives or obstacles, and meant little to nothing. While in my mind, such a perspective is a positive foundational belief and a good way to raise one's children, the current focus and emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion have significantly changed my perspective and belief in the positive value and importance of diversity and inclusion.

Diversity and inclusion are not necessary, important or worthy of support and attention because, for the most part we are the same, but because, in fact, fundamental differences—our diversity—do exist and are real, and it is what makes inclusion so important and valuable. Whether our differences are based on race, religion, ethnic background, national origin, geographic upbringing, age or generation, gender, sexual orientation, disability (among other differences), or a combination of them, we are different in many real and fundamental ways, and that is a good thing. It is not just, "not an obstacle or negative" that might detract from our interactions with others and our joint efforts and activities. Our differences are important and valuable. As a result of them, we perceive, react, evaluate and judge things differently. We experience and see things differently, and ultimately think differently.

The most successful organizations are ones that are diverse and actively work to support inclusion. These organizations, whatever type they might be, are smarter and make better decisions and are more innovative and successful. Diverse groups are smarter than homogeneous ones, in terms of problem solving and decision making. A diverse group of decision makers identifies more relevant facts, constantly reexamines those facts, considers more alternative solutions, makes fewer incorrect assumptions and errors and remains more objective. We become more aware of our own respective biases and assumptions and stale ways of thinking. These positive and valuable benefits of diversity and inclusion have been borne out by multiple, varied scientific reports and studies, and by my own experiences. It is for these reasons that, while at times, possibly uncomfortable for some, and despite the fact that diversity often brings more conflict and decisions more difficult to reach, diversity and inclusion are essential if we (any group, profession, business, judicial panel or court, or law firm) are going to be successful, make the best decisions and reach its and our full potential.