

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council
December 13th, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The DEI Council advances diversity, equity, and inclusion and addresses the problems of bias, systemic inequities and underrepresentation in the legal profession and legal system.

Attendance

Member Attendees: Raina Wagner, Miryam Gordon, Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel, Gov. Tom Ahearne, Gov. Nam Nguyen, Alec Stephens, Mia Scavella, Noelle Chung, SaNni Lemonidis, Dallas Martinez, Christopher Swaby, Honorable Andrea S. Jarmon, Gov. Brent Williams-Ruth

WSBA Staff: Diana Singleton, Nicholas Mejía, Saleena Salango

Guests: Gov. Jordan Couch, Paris Eriksen

November Meeting Minutes

Miryam Gordon motioned to approve with attendance amendment (inclusion of Alec Stephens) of Alec's attendance, seconded by Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel, Gov. Tom Ahearne abstained, all others voted to approve. Motion passes.

Bar Licensure Task Force

Diana gave a brief introduction regarding the recommendations made in the materials that were provided. Governor Jordan Couch attended to share more information about the Washington State Bar Licensure Task Force Recommendations. Gov. Couch acknowledged the equity concerns about the bar examination and the hopes that the Next Gen Bar Exam would reduce racial disparities in pass rates and better assess competency. Nevertheless, the National Council for Bar Exams have not solved the equity gap in the last 25 years despite frequent changes. The WBLTF recommendations include an experiential pathway in lieu of the Bar exam, but ultimately kept the option for the Bar exam open as well since they anticipate inequities in opportunities for law students.

Miryam Gordon asked whether the WBLTF considered alternate pathways to the profession other than law school. Gov. Couch stated that the WBLTF focused on attorney licensure and did not address alternate licenses, but acknowledged that the work is ongoing.

Raina Wagner asked if there has been data to assess whether there have been different outcomes for the cohort for those who had their exams waived during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gov. Couch mentioned they are not currently tracking that data but may do so in the future.

Gov. Couch recognized the need for additional data; there currently is no system to track demographic data for bar exam applicants and passages to be able to fully understand equity gaps present in Washington State. He also mentioned that the OCLA Civil Legal Needs Study from 2008 is a report that may be critical for attorneys to read as it pertains to correlation to understanding the need and impact on client communities. Alec Stephens asked the BLTF to reconsider the question of what the bar exam is

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meant to do. Saleena Salango mentioned that the intention of the bar exam and the character and fitness evaluation is to protect members of the public and yet public trust in legal professionals and the legal system remains low; did the BLTF consider ways to involve client communities in assessments of competency? Gov. Couch says that they considered this, but acknowledges the work is ongoing.

The Council approved a motion to submit written comments in support of the Bar Licensure Task Force's recommendations and the Council's interest to be involved with ongoing efforts to advance equity by January 4th. Gov. Sunitha, Hon. Andrea Jarmon, SaNni Lemonidis, Raina Wagner, and Miryam Gordon volunteered to be part of the group who will write this letter.

DEI Council Charter Amendment

Diana gave a brief introduction on the charter amendment. Alec moved to approve the charter amendments as drafted and corrected. Miryam Gordon seconded Alec's motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Higher Logic Volunteer Program

Saleena Salango shared information about Higher Logic, a web platform for volunteers. The DEI Council had been invited to be a participant in the pilot project. Several volunteers and volunteer entities have requested that WSBA provide a platform for volunteers to better collaborate and communicate. The goal of this is to explore whether this platform meets those needs and helps volunteers better work together. The pilot consists of 12 entities; if these groups find this program to be helpful, they will expand this to all entities. Paris gave a brief demonstration on the program and answered questions about moderation, visibility, access, and ease of use:

- This platform is linked with MyWSBA accounts. All volunteers at the WSBA have a MyWSBA account already, which means this platform does not require members to create additional accounts
- This platform is web-based and does not require the download of applications as reported in a previous meeting. People may also access on their mobile devices using a web browser.
- Participants only see the feed for the entity groups they have been added to. DEI Council members and others who have been invited into the work will be the only ones who are able to see the documents, pages, and conversation threads within the platform
- There are several moderation options: communities can have one or two designated moderators, be self-moderated by all members of that community, or have no moderation. Regardless of how communities are moderated, the platform has a program to automatically remove profanity.

Subcommittee/Workgroup Updates

Pathways into the Profession - Mia shared about the Pathways Summit planning, which they aim to hold in September 2024. They are interested in having the event in central and eastern Washington. They have reached out to Heritage University and Central Washington University to discuss hosting the event at either of the universities.

DEI Plan - There are no significant updates. The next meeting is January 5th at 2:00 p.m.

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Membership Demographic Study - The study consultant is hoping to begin focus groups of members from different identity groups in January and February.

Announcements

Nicholas Mejía, announced to the council that he will be resigning his position at the WSBA come the end of December and will begin his new role as a Legislative Aide for the House Democratic Caucus.