

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council
February 14th, 2024 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: Gov. Brent Williams-Ruth, Gov. Thomas Ahearne, Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel, SaNni Lemonidis, Miryam Gordon, Alec Stephens, Raina Wagner, Sharon Sakamoto, Viveca Burnette, Dallas Martinez, Nam Nguyen, Michael Rhodes, Hon. Andrea Jarmon, Mia Little

WSBA Staff: Diana Singleton, Saleena Salango

Guests: Nancy Hawkins

Meeting started 12:02 p.m.

Discussion on Supporting Seattle LGBTQ+ Business Community

Gov. Brent Williams-Ruth shared information about an occurrence in which LGBTQ+ bars in Seattle had been investigated by Joint Enforcement Team and Liquor and Cannabis Control Board with several uniformed officers entering them and collecting photographic and videographic evidence. The level of enforcement seemed unwarranted, citing “lewd conduct”. Following these events, the Liquor Control Board severed ties with the Joint Enforcement Team. The QLaw Association Board voted to support efforts. Gov. Williams-Ruth would like the DEI Council to submit a public records request under the Public Records Act to the Liquor and Control Board and the City of Seattle to better understand 1) how long they were at the establishment, and 2) whether intimidation and harassment occurred.

Nancy Hawkins (guest) shared additional information on the history discrimination and harassment of the LGBTQ+ community by law enforcement and the Liquor Control Board. Miryam Gordon shared that the Liquor Control Board intends to remove “lewd and lascivious conduct” from the idea and asked what the specific ask is for the Council.

Gov. Williams-Ruth added that another issue is the collection of photographic and videographic evidence that may be used for intimidation of the LGBTQ+ community. The goals behind DEI Council involvement is to gather additional information about the intention behind these raids and factors resulting in the decisions to authorize investigations. Gov. Williams-Ruth urged the DEI Council to leverage its position and authority to help improve the administration of justice, which is part of the WSBA’s purpose and authorized activities per GR 12.2, as well as the WSBA mission.

Gov. Stephens urged the Council to ensure collaboration with WSBA General Counsel and that the request does not include a position. Diana Singleton shared that she just reached out to General Counsel to get her preliminary input. She shared that Julie Shankland asked whether any action the Council wants to take should come before the BOG for approval and whether the proposed action is germane to the regulation of lawyers or improving the quality of legal services. If this was to be brought to the BOG,

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

we'd have to see if this could be squeezed onto the March BOG meeting agenda. Alec Stephens suggested making an inquiry rather than a formal records request to better gather information. This is separate from making a comment, but rather taking steps to gather information to decide whether or not to make a comment. Saleena Salango suggested that in the absence of information about whether this is something we are authorized to do and what the process may be, DEI Council members may still express individual support of the efforts. Sharon Sakamoto and Michael Rhodes wished to go on record with their expressed support for Brent Williams-Ruth's work to gather additional information.

Miryam Gordon shared the following written comment during the meeting:

“The whole process of inquiry is going to take time and therefore the idea that the Council is doing something quickly would only be embodied in the >action< of asking, which I do think is what Brent felt was a way of showing that "people care"... not really sure if there is any particular concern past the actual "ask" itself. We can certainly determine actions past the request, but the timing on the request itself seems to be the desired effect.”

Gov. Thomas Ahearne shared that gathering accurate information quickly may require a public records request rather than a public inquiry. Michael Rhodes inquired about whether members support a Public Records Act Request in addition to or in place of a public inquiry. Judge Jarmon agreed that public inquiries may have limited efficacy, and suggested we gather additional entities.

Alec Stephens motioned for the DEI Council submit a letter of public inquiry to gather additional information from the Liquor Control Board and the City of Seattle on what occurred and what steps they are taking following the January 2024 raids of LGBTQ+ establishments in Seattle, on the condition that it is permissible under GR 12.2. Seconded by SaNni Lemonidis. Motion passed unanimously.

January Meeting Minutes

Thomas Ahearne offered an amendment to replace the word “needs” with “tools” surrounding the discussion on the Higher Logic Volunteer Platform. On motion from Sunitha Anjilvel to approve with the above amendment, seconded by Raina Wagner, the DEI Council approved the January minutes.

DEI Council Charter Amendment

Diana Singleton shared that General Counsel reviewed the proposed amendments and suggested reinstatement of the following statement: “Applications to serve on the Council shall be in accordance with WSBA Bylaws, policies, and procedures.” On motion to approve the proposed amendments with the above addition, the DEI Council passed.

January BOG Meeting

Sunitha Anjilvel shared that Miryam and Sharon presented a status report on the DEI Plan process, which was well-received by the Board of Governors. Raina Wagner reported that the discussion around the Bar Licensure Task Force Recommendations was lively, with several Board members concerned about the

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

substance of the Recommendations. Nancy Hawkins commented that additional education of Board members needs to be done to demonstrate that barriers to the profession persist in WA.

Subcommittee/Workgroup Updates

Pathways into the Profession – Dallas Martinez shared that we had a planning group kickoff meeting last Friday, 2/9, which included a variety of folks statewide who have expressed an interest in helping to plan the summit. In addition, several subcommittee members will attend a college and career fair at Rising Star Elementary School to expose elementary age children to the legal community and career pathway.

DEI Plan – Sharon and Miryam shared that the consultants from the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession attended the last meeting to clarify the plan development process. The consultants will begin focus groups, beginning with the DEI Council members. Sharon urged members to share their availability to ensure we move along.

MBA-DEI Council Buddy Idea

Michael Rhodes shared an idea to have DEI Council members assigned an MBA to stay in the loop on. Thomas Ahearne asked if we want to have DEI Council members matched with an MBA based on that member's own social identity, or do we want to have a member who doesn't have that identity. Mike said he thinks it'd be great to have someone who shares that identity. But it also depends who's interested in who they're a liaison to.

APEX Award Nominations

Hon. Jarmon suggested we come up with a group nomination for APEX Award. The nominations are due February 29th, 2024. Miryam suggested that the DEI Council should consider a standing subgroup that focuses on pathways to leadership and recognition.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

We discussed prioritizing the following agenda items for the March meeting:

- Retreat and Training Planning
- LLLT Program Discussion

Meeting adjourned 1:35 p.m.