

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council
March 13th, 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, Mia Little, Miryam Gordon, Gov. Tom Ahearne, Raina Wagner, Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel, SaNni Lemonidis, Sharon Sakamoto, Michael Rhodes, Dallas Martinez, Gov. Nam Nguyen, Viveca Burnette

WSBA Staff: Diana Singleton, Saleena Salango

Guests: Hon. Michael Finkle, Cathy Biestek

Meeting started at 12:06 p.m.

February Meeting Minutes

On motion by Miryam Gordon, seconded by Raina Wagner, the Council voted unanimously to approve the February meeting minutes.

BOG Meeting Updates

Supporting QLAW and the LGBTQIA+2S Community

Gov. Williams-Ruth reported the Board of Governors did not receive a second on the motion to approve the DEI Council to submit a letter to the JET and Liquor and Cannabis Control Board. This was based upon concerns about GR 12. While the Board did not support this work, individual DEI Council members can send in requests for information and support QLAW efforts to gather information.

DEI Council Charter Amendment

Raina Wagner reported that the Board of Governors approved the charter amendment for the DEI Council.

DEI Council and LLLT Program

Sharon Sakamoto led a discussion on whether the DEI Council could do additional research around the LLLT program and the Washington Supreme Court voted to sunset it in a closed decision. Saleena shared that the LLLT program is one type of solution for stratifying the profession, providing more specialized degrees with less educational requirements, which would cost a lot less than a general education program for law schools.

Gov. Nguyen shared that the BOG may not be open to this approach. Miryam Gordon offered her perspective as an active LLLT and suggested making changes to strengthen the program that allows them to represent their clients in court. Miryam added that the Board of Governors treasurer went to the

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Supreme Court with concerns about costs of administering the program, which added to the decision about how to sunset it. Miryam suggested that the educational component for LLLT was well-developed, and that there were

Saleena shared that one strategy is to involve more members of the public, since many licensing discussions taken up by the Board of Governors tend to reference the desire to protect the public. However, the cost and lack of legal professionals make it so that people cannot access the legal system, which causes deep harm. We could also present indirect costs to the courts of continuing to keep high barriers in place (e.g. inefficiencies caused by pro-se representation, delays in justice, downstream costs to addressing issues caused by unmet legal needs). Raina suggested this Council continue these conversations, potentially within our Subcommittees.

Gov. Williams-Ruth shared that the court composition remains the same as when it was sunset. Gov. Nguyen suggested working with the LLLT Board. Miryam shared that the LLLT Board is planning to present an update to the BOG at an upcoming meeting. Miryam shared that family law attorneys were generally opposed due to concerns around competition.

We discussed continuing these conversations within the Pathways Summit planning group, since the Subcommittee worked so hard to convene different folks. Miryam, Raina, and Sharon will meet to consider outreach to BOG and others.

Retreat and Training Planning

We discussed having an in-person retreat for DEI Council members. We will share more information to coordinate a date/time/location.

Subcommittee/Workgroup Updates

Membership Demographic Study – Diana Singleton shared that we have reviewed preliminary data. KGR+C is still coordinating focus groups for the following identity groups:

- Latine/o/a/x
- Asian
- LGBTQ+
- Black/African American

We asked members to leverage their personal connections to reach out to these members.

Pathways into the Profession – Dallas Martinez reported on the last Summit Planning meeting. We had great turnout, and we are working to finalize the location and dates. We are also working to specify different types of work available to folks. Dallas also shared about the Rising Star Elementary School Job Fair; several members went to share their experiences as a legal professional and help with activities aimed at increasing interest in the profession for young kids in South Seattle.

DEI Plan – Sharon and Miryam reported that IILP are continuing to conduct focus groups.

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MBA-DEI Council Buddy Idea

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Meeting adjourned 1: p.m.