



An Update on ABI's Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

Written by:

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The recent tragic (but, I hope, transformative) events our country has experienced remind us that we have important work to do to address the systemic inequities that have held people of color, and others, back for far too long. We at ABI will certainly not be able to resolve these pervasive and complex issues, but we can do our own small part. Around 2,000 years ago, a sage wrote, "It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but you are not free to desist from it, either." In that spirit, I am writing to update you on ABI's initiatives in the areas of diversity, inclusion and the elimination of bias, and to encourage you to support these initiatives in your own communities and to join ABI in promoting diversity, inclusion and the elimination of bias in our professions.

ABI had been hard at work on these issues long before the recent events. At a meeting last year, ABI's Executive Committee approved my proposal to establish a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. **Kerriann S. Mills**, who was at the time a partner at Sidley Austin LLP in Chicago and one of ABI's "40 Under 40" honorees, and I were given the privilege of co-chairing this working group.

I asked for volunteers to join this working group, and was thrilled to have a group of extraordinarily talented ABI members answer the call. In addition to ABI's current Executive Director, **Amy A. Quackenboss**, they included **Omar J. Alaniz** (Baker Botts LLP; Dallas), Hon. **Hannah L. Blumenstiel** (U.S. Bankruptcy Court (N.D. Cal.); San Francisco), **Sonia Colón** (Ferraiuoli LLC; Orlando, Fla.), Prof. **Pamela Foohey** of the Indiana University Maurer School of Law (Bloomington, Ind.), ABI Chairman **Ted Gavin** (Gavin/Solmonese LLC; Wilmington, Del.), ABI President Hon. **Barbara J. Houser** (U.S. Bankruptcy Court (N.D. Tex.); Dallas), **Allen G. Kadish** (Archer & Greiner, P.C.; New York), **Shanti Katona** (Polsinelli PC; Wilmington, Del.), **Zhao (Ruby) Liu** (The Rosner Law Group LLC; Wilmington, Del.), **Luis Salazar** (Salazar Law; Coral Gables, Fla.) and Hon. **Deborah L. Thorne** (U.S. Bankruptcy Court (N.D. Ill.); Chicago).

It is worth noting a few things about this group. First, it is comprised of very busy people, each of whom already has a demanding job and numerous other obligations. But each of

them recognized the importance of this initiative and immediately raised their hands. Second, there were no free-riders and no hierarchy; each of the members rolled up his or her sleeves and did the work. Third, the members of this group were extraordinarily thoughtful about the issues, and each of them had a deep personal commitment to diversity and inclusion. Finally, and from my perspective most importantly, this working group was diverse in nearly every way: We came from different professions and different parts of the country, and we are of different ages, genders, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities and religious backgrounds. We have had very different life experiences. But we came together, collaboratively, with a common objective: “To develop recommendations to increase diversity within ABI and its leadership, to help create opportunities for diverse ABI members, and otherwise to promote diversity and inclusion within ABI and within our professions.” Working with this group was an incredibly rewarding experience, and a testament to the proposition that diverse groups generate better ideas and solutions.

After numerous meetings and calls, consultations with people with expertise in diversity and inclusion initiatives and with ABI leaders, and the circulation of numerous drafts, the working group came up with a detailed set of recommendations that fell within seven general categories: (1) Pipeline Programs; (2) Mentorship; (3) Profile-Raising Initiatives; (4) Training Programs; (5) Accessibility; (6) Gender Diversity and Terminology; and (7) ABI Leadership and Staff.

These recommendations were reviewed with and approved by the Executive Committee and by ABI’s Board of Directors, with the caveat that they could not all be implemented at once but would instead have to be rolled out over time, given the substantial resources that their implementation would require. Implementation will be overseen by small volunteer teams for each of the seven categories, comprised of members of the working group who agreed to continue their efforts, a few other individuals who have since volunteered, and a member of ABI’s staff for each of the seven teams. I am excited to join with other ABI members in working on the implementation of the recommendations, which will make ABI a better and stronger organization.

If you are interested in working on diversity issues with the ABI Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, please email me at michael.bernstein@arnoldporter.com or ABI’s Executive Director, Amy Quackenboss, at aquackenboss@abi.org.