

The call to action for racial and ethnic diversity seeks commitments

...from signatory law firms and legal departments to reaffirm their commitment to diversity and participate in an annual diversity survey

Diversity brings with it valuable perspectives, experiences, and talents, which allow legal departments to be more creative, more effective, and ultimately more successful in the practice of law. Over the past 30 years, the legal profession has made great strides in the promotion of diversity. Unfortunately, the present economic situation facing the legal profession has had a disproportionate effect on minority attorneys and minority bar associations.

In an effort to address this problem and promote diversity within the St. Louis legal community, following in the footsteps of many private industry programs, the BAMSL Board of Governors unanimously approved the St. Louis Call to Action for Racial and Ethnic Diversity. The Call to Action invites legal employers to reaffirm their commitment to diversity within the legal profession.

As part of this Call to Action, the Minorities in the Legal Profession Committee (MILP) will begin conducting an annual diversity survey. The data collected through The Annual Minorities in the Legal Profession Survey of St. Louis law firms and legal departments will be analyzed to assess minority inclusion within the legal market of metropolitan St. Louis. This data will assist BAMSL in better serving the minority community as well as improving diversity in the legal

community in the metropolitan St. Louis area overall.

Every three years, in addition to collecting statistical data concerning the racial make-up of attorneys in the St. Louis legal community, MILP will also survey law firms and legal departments regarding diversity programs and efforts to promote diversity. Through this additional questionnaire, we ask about minority recruiting, retention programs, participation in various diverse bar organizations, and company specific diversity efforts, such as scholarships.

Through the survey, we employ a multifaceted review of diversity and inclusion efforts utilized by St. Louis legal employers. Our aim is to gain insight, not only into the hiring, but also the retention and promotion of minority attorneys. Aside from information gathering, the Call to Action encourages legal employers in St. Louis to continuously work to improve their diversity programs. The triennial survey will

assist the committee in assessing the effect of different diversity programs on the statistical data, such that recommendations can be made in the future regarding which programs appear to be the most effective in the St. Louis legal market.

The questions included in both surveys are based upon surveys conducted by other organizations interested in



Jessica M. Mendez, Associate, Armstrong Teasdale LLP

promoting diversity, including the 2011 Vault/MCAA Law Firm Diversity Survey as well as the Dallas Diversity Task Force 2011 Law Firm Diversity Report, The Mound City Bar Association Employment Commission Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention Survey; and the BAMSL Individual Rights Committee Survey on Employment Policies and Practices. Cities, such as San Francisco and Dallas have already implemented call to action programs, which successfully increased diversity within their respective legal markets. The program developed by MILP to be implemented by BAMSL in St. Louis is based upon these programs, but has also been tailored to the St. Louis legal market.

As BAMSL implements the Call to Action, the MILP committee will serve as a resource for legal employers in St. Louis, offering guidance to aid in implementation of new diversity efforts. In the coming months the MILP committee will be preparing a recommended Diversity Statement and Diversity Plan for adoption by firms and legal departments. We hope that the Call to Action will forge collaborative relationships between

“ The Call to Action invites legal employers to reaffirm their commitment to diversity within the legal profession. ”

BAMSL, minority bar associations, and legal employers that advance the mutually beneficial goals of diversity and inclusion. With the commitment

of signatories to the Call to Action, as well as participation in the annual survey, the Call to Action will help move the ball forward in a meaningful way.

The survey will be presented to the executive committee during September for approval. We anticipate that the survey will be made available to legal employers in electronic format in October. ■