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New Program Calls On Managing Partners, General Counsel to Make 'Personal Commitments' to Diversity

"We looked at each other as board members and said, 'If this group of the most powerful general counsels and managing partners in the country can't make progress, who can?'" said Crowell & Moring's Ellen Dwyer, who chairs the LCLD board.

By Dylan Jackson | October 22, 2020



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The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), an executive organization composed of the heads of more than 300 law firms and in-house legal departments, is asking its members to make data-driven, public commitments to advancing diversity as part of a new initiative dubbed "Leaders on the Front."

So far, 15 of the organization's members have made diversity pledges (<https://www.lclldnet.org/leaders-at-the-front/leader-pledges/>), including Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe managing partner Mitch Zuklie; Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld managing partner Kim Koopersmith; The Walt Disney Co. general counsel Alan Braverman; and HP chief legal officer Kim Rivera.

The pledges are both personal and organizational. Crowell & Moring executive committee partner Ellen Dwyer, who chairs the LCLD board, personally pledged (<https://www.lclldnet.org/leaders-at-the-front/leader-pledges/ellen-dwyer/>) to sponsor two Black lawyers to help them advance in their careers, for example. She also committed the firm to undertake annual examinations of its compensation system to root out racial inequities, and to consider the number of times a partner has designated a woman or minority attorney to handle a client matter during yearly compensation evaluations.

The LCLD recently commissioned nonprofit think tank Coqual to survey the attitudes of more than 200 LCLD members and programming alumni. Among other things, the survey (http://www.lclldnet.org/media/uploads/resource/Talent_Rising_Results_from_the_LCLD-Coqual_Survey_10.20.20.pdf) found that less than half believe that their organizations, whether it be a legal department or a law firm, are inclusive, and that Black attorneys are the least likely to have sponsorship.

Dwyer said the survey and the historic protests this year against systemic racism and police violence informed the latest initiative.

"LCLD has been in existence for 10 years. It was time, with the unique membership we have, to come together and make personal commitments as leaders," Dwyer said. "We looked at each other as board members and said, 'If this group of the most powerful general counsels and managing partners in the country can't make progress, who can?'"

While just 15 of the organization's 300 members have made pledges so far, the expectation is that all members will make similar pledges. LCLD president Robert Grey said the organization will discuss common goals and highlight those who have made exceptional progress in the three leadership summits to come in the next year.

"Going forward, we're going to have peer circles to refresh their plans, the challenges," Grey said. "In a collegial body like LCLD with both in-house and outside counsel making themselves available to work with each other, that peer accountability, peer mentoring and peer access makes the plans more likely to achieve the results."

The initiative was announced a day after new data (<https://www.law.com/2020/10/21/new-data-on-racial-disparities-in-lawyer-hiring-is-a-wake-up-call-for-the-profession/>) from the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) found significant disparities in employment outcomes among new law graduates.

The analysis found that in 2019, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders had the highest overall employment rate 10 months after graduation at 93%, followed by white law graduates at 92%. In contrast, Native American and Alaskan Natives, as well as Black law graduates, had the lowest overall employment rate at 85%.

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