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## CBA Delegates Approve Diversity Commitment Policy

Leaders say attorneys of color will be offered leadership training

Jay Stapleton, The Connecticut Law Tribune

April 1, 2015

The Connecticut Bar Association has been working to improve diversity among its ranks, perhaps most notably with the recent election of biracial lawyer Karen DeMeola to serve as vice president.

The organization took those efforts one step further recently, when the CBA House of Delegates unanimously approved a formal diversity policy. With that vote, the organization's leadership said it has made a long-term commitment to make the state's legal community "more inclusive" to people from all races, cultures and backgrounds.

The new official policy statement was approved on March 23 by the House, which is the primary policymaking body of the CBA. The statement makes clear that the CBA "is committed to diversity in its membership," according to Mark Dubois, CBA president. That commitment is also a priority for the CBA's leadership, including the executive committee, practice sections and committees.

"We are a richer and more effective association because of diversity, as it increases our association's strengths, capabilities and adaptability," reads the policy statement. "Through increased diversity, our organization can more effectively address member and societal needs with varied perspectives, experiences, knowledge, information and understanding inherent in a diverse relationship."

Dubois, who worked with others to create the new diversity policy, said the statement "will serve as a benchmark to increase diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the association's activities."

"Diversity is key to keeping the CBA a growing and relevant professional organization" Dubois said. "Our House of Delegates has overwhelmingly supported our leadership in making this a priority for the future."

Though Dubois' tenure as leader of the association will come to a close at the end of June, incoming President William Clendenen Jr. and incoming President-elect Monte Frank have said they are committed to continuing down the same path and will be taking the lead on pushing inclusivity initiatives over the next two years. Clendenen, a partner at Clendenen & Shea in New Haven, said there are a pair of initiatives that will be taken up with the new policy. First, he said, the membership is being asked to make recommendations for lawyers of diverse backgrounds who might be appointed to leadership roles in CBA sections and committees. "I like to call this having 'seats at the table,'" Clendenen said. "It's one thing to talk about, but let's get to work to bring diverse voices to positions of leadership so they can help formulate policy."

Also in the works is a leadership training program, Clendenen said, in which CBA leadership will begin identifying young lawyers who might benefit from a mentoring program. "If you come from a diverse background, we will help you develop the tools for professional development," Clendenen said of the leadership initiative. "This is more than symbolic. We want to help young lawyers to work on these skills."

Both programs will be priorities when Clendenen takes over on July 1.

The bar association has taken other steps in recent years to boost diversity. That includes setting aside a certain amount of seats in the House of Delegates for members of the so-called affinity bars, which include the Crawford Black Bar Association and the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association.

Even after that step was taken, there was still some criticism that the CBA had never had a nonwhite president. Earlier this year, the CBA's nominating committee announced that DeMeola, an assistant dean of students at the University of Connecticut School of Law who identifies as biracial, has been chosen to serve as vice president. In the laddered leadership structure of the CBA, on July 1 Vice President Monte Frank will become president-elect and President Mark Dubois will become immediate past president. DeMeola's time at the helm will come in 2017.

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