

Diversity Committee report

By Kimberly Wong, Diversity Committee Chair



During my ten years as a plaintiff's attorney, I have seen how the plaintiff's bar does not come close to reflecting the diversity of our community. This is something we must improve. Diversity is important because it helps attorneys better understand, communicate, and serve their clients and their community. Because diverse people bring different experiences and perspectives, it also promotes innovation.

Striving for increased diversity

CAOC's Diversity Committee has broadly defined "diversity" as referring to those groups that are historically under-represented in the legal profession based on disability, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. As part of the committee's strategic plan, the committee seeks to identify and implement strategies that will result in significant and measurable progress toward increasing diversity of the plaintiff's bar in general and CAOC in particular.

Creating a pipeline for diversity

A couple of questions have continually nagged me: Why is the plaintiff's bar not more diverse? What can be done to increase diversity in the plaintiff's bar so that it better reflects and represents the diverse community it serves? While there may be many different answers to these questions, law school is a logical place to start. Law school is the critical time when future attorneys consider their options and decide what career path and practice area they intend to pursue.

Everyone has their own personal journey to how they became a plaintiff's attorney.

However, it seems unusual to find current attorneys who entered or exited law school knowing that they wanted to join the plaintiff's bar. Upon reflection of my own personal experiences and stories learned from others over the years, I have theorized that there are three critical items that greatly impact law students' decisions whether to pursue a career as a plaintiff's attorney: (1) exposure; (2) opportunity; and (3) support. By increasing law students' exposure to the nature, benefits, and availability of plaintiff's work as a potential career path as well as providing greater opportunities and support to law students interested in the field, significant progress should be made towards our diversity goals.

The inadequate exposure to plaintiff's work in law school is a major issue. Law students readily learn about big firm attorneys and the coveted summer associate positions as well as the career paths of government attorneys, public interest attorneys, and judges, but not so much about plaintiff's work. We need to find ways to increase students' awareness of what we do and share the passion that so many of us have for our chosen practice. Students will then be in a much better position to consider and develop an interest in becoming a plaintiff's attorney.

We also need to support law students who have developed an interest in plaintiff's work by providing opportunities for them to gain experience in the field while in law school and obtain entry-level attorney positions. Without these opportunities, prospective plaintiff's attorneys will be less likely to see plaintiff's work as a viable option and consequently be more likely to choose a different career path.

Support is important to help a person succeed or achieve a goal. Without adequate support, a person is more likely

to fail or choose a different option. Law students who receive support and guidance in their journey to become a plaintiff's attorney are more likely to succeed in following their desired career path.

One of the things I love about being a plaintiff's attorney is the community and network of support where we will not hesitate to sacrifice our limited time to help our colleagues fight for a common cause. CAOC President, Lee Harris, has said: "Pound for pound CAOC is the strongest organization in California." Let's channel some of that strength towards our diversity initiatives. There are many things we can do that require minimal time and commitment, but still make a significant impact towards increasing diversity.

Getting involved with law schools

We need to be more actively involved in our local law schools so students receive more exposure to what we do and why we enjoy this worthy practice. I challenge our members to commit to at least one of these activities this year:

1. Guest lecture at a trial advocacy, civil litigation, or evidence class.
2. Coach a mock trial team.
3. Meet students through school speed networking events.
4. Speak at a career panel.
5. Participate in an on-campus job fair.
6. Conduct a mock interview.
7. Attend a mixer or other networking event.
8. Agree to an informational interview.
9. Sign up to become a student mentor through a local school or bar association.
10. Become a mentor or a resource to a student outside of a formal mentorship program.