

For immediate release

August 2, 2004

Contact: Paul S. Ruiz, Hispanic Bar Association of Austin, (512) 656-5654

Fifth Annual Report Card Shows Minority Hiring Lags at Some Austin Law Firms

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, thus paving the way for integration of America's public schools. In many respects, the *Brown* decision opened the door for minorities to pursue educational opportunities in areas such as law, medicine, engineering, and teaching. However, today, 50 years after the *Brown* decision, some Austin law firms have failed to diversify and fully integrate the ranks of their attorneys in the spirit of the *Brown* decision.

According to an annual report card prepared by the Hispanic Bar Association of Austin and the Austin Black Lawyers Association, some of Austin's largest law firms have made great strides in hiring and promoting minority attorneys. However, the report card also shows several of Austin's large law firms have failed to make any progress in recruiting and hiring minority lawyers.

"Not only is diversity important from a social standpoint," said Vanessa Gonzalez, President of the HBAA, "in 21st century Texas, it is a business imperative. With minorities constituting almost half of the population, Texas businesses—including law firms in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin—must diversify in order to remain viable and competitive in the future."

According to statistics published by the State Bar of Texas, as of December 31, 2003, 14 percent of the 66,358 attorneys in Texas are Hispanic, African American, Asian, or Native

American. In Travis County, 12 percent of licensed attorneys are minorities.

For the fifth straight year, the HBAA and the ABLA issued their report card grading the hiring of minority attorneys by Austin's 25 largest law firms. Using the statewide average as a guide, the HBAA and the ABLA awarded an "A" grade to Austin law firms with 14 percent or more minority attorneys.

For the third straight year, Andrews Kurth, LLP received an A+ grade for its efforts in recruiting and hiring minority lawyers. Three other Austin law firms also received "A" grades, including Locke Liddell & Sapp, LLP with 21 percent minority lawyers; Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollan, Kever & McDaniel, LLP with 16 percent minority lawyers; and Winstead Sechrest & Minick, PC with 14.3 percent minority lawyers.

On the other end of the spectrum, four law firms received failing grades for their lack of minority attorneys. The Austin office of Akin, Gump, Straus, Hauer & Feld, with just 5.6 percent minority lawyers, fell from a "C" grade last year to an "F" grade this year. Austin-based law firm Scott, Douglass & McConnico, LLP, with 5 percent minority lawyers, earned a failing grade for the fourth straight year, and Austin-based law firm Graves, Dougherty, Hearon & Moody, with 3.4 percent minority lawyers, earned a failing grade for the fifth straight year. One Austin law firm new to the report card and in its second year of existence—DuBois, Bryant, Campbell & Schwartz, LLP—received an "F" grade for having no minorities among its 18 attorneys.

Nine Austin law firms received "B" grades, four firms received "C" grades, and four law firms received a "D" grade.

As they did last year, the HBAA and the ABLA again issued a Diversity Progress Report showing the grades received by Austin law firms over the past five years. “We believe the Diversity Progress Report is important because it shows us over the long term what progress some Austin law firms are making in recruiting and hiring minority lawyers and, conversely, which law firms are making no efforts in that area,” said Gonzalez.

“The ABLA and the HBAA are serious about the recruitment, employment, and retention of minority attorneys,” said Brian Jammer, President of the ABLA. “Clearly, some Austin law firms are not making an effort to become more diverse, and our organizations want to call attention to that fact,” he said. Mr. Jammer noted that many corporate clients are now asking outside law firms for their numbers on minority and female attorneys. “Diversity is becoming increasingly important to corporate America,” he said, “and we believe it should be equally important to the law firms they hire.” To that end, Jammer announced that the report card, the Diversity Progress Report, and the press release will be sent to businesses throughout the Austin area, including clients of the law firms graded, as well as local and national media, local and state officials, State Bar leaders, and members of the local judiciary.

The Hispanic Bar Association of Austin and the Austin Black Lawyers Association are committed to helping Austin law firms increase recruitment and hiring of minority lawyers, and the HBAA and the ABLA have pledged to continue issuing their annual report card.

###