

For immediate release

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Eight Area Law Firms Receive “A+” for Minority Hiring Practices; Nine law firms fail to make the grade

In its sixth year, the annual report card on minority hiring and retention prepared by the Hispanic Bar Association of Austin (HBAA) and the Austin Black Lawyers Association (ABLA) shows that most larger law firms in Austin are making efforts to promote diversity and have improved the number of minority attorneys they hire and retain. However, the report card also shows that, of the 1,104 attorneys employed by the 25 largest law firms in Austin, only 11.3% are minorities. In addition, only 23% of the 138 summer law clerks hired by these firms are minority law students. In Texas, nearly half of the population is minority, yet only 14 percent of attorneys in the state are non-white.

This year, eight law firms received an A+ grade for their efforts. Those firms and the percentage of minority lawyers are:

- Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollan, Kever & McDaniel (21.4%)
- Locke Liddell & Sapp (21.4%)
- Andrews Kurth (20%)
- DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary (18.2%)
- Jenkins & Gilchrist (16.7%)
- Winstead Sechrest & Minick (16.3%)
- Strasburger & Price (15.8%)
- Thompson & Knight (14.3%)

“Aside from being the right thing to do, it makes business sense to hire minority lawyers,” says Brian Jammer, President of the ABLA. “More and more, sophisticated corporate clients are asking their outside legal counsel for information on the diversity of attorneys within their firms,” he noted.

Jammer made specific mention of retailer Wal-Mart, who recently informed its outside law firms that at least one person of color and one female must be among the top five

relationship attorneys handling its business. Other giant corporations such as Sara Lee and General Motors also have similar policies, he added.

Using the statewide percentage of minority attorneys as a guide, the HBAA and the ABLA awarded an “A” grade to Austin law firms with 14 percent or more minority attorneys. The groups also recognized law firms’ efforts at promoting diversity with “plus” grades. Such efforts include participating in minority job fairs, providing attorney mentors for minority law students, having a committee within the firm to promote diversity, including minority attorneys in recruitment efforts, participating in panel discussions for minority law students, providing scholarships for minority law students, having a firm-wide diversity plan, and providing mentors for minority law students. Conversely, law firms that made minimal effort or no effort at promoting diversity were given “minus” grades.

Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati (17.2%) and Bracewell & Guiliani (14.8%) both received an “A”. Three law firms received “B” grades, and three law firms received “C” grades. Eight firms received “D” grades, but of those eight, three improved from last year’s “F” grades.

This year, only one law firm received an “F”—DuBois, Bryant, Campbell & Schwartz—a relatively new firm with only one minority among its 26 attorneys and no reported efforts at diversifying. “Given that the DuBois firm made an “F” last year, we were hopeful that it would make some attempt at adding a significant number of minority attorneys,” said Paul Ruiz, Chairman of the Joint HBAA/ABLA Committee on Law Firm Hiring. “However, besides hiring one minority out of eight new lawyers added since last year, the firm has made no discernable attempt to encourage diversity,” he added.

The report card was accompanied by a Progress Report showing the grades earned by large Austin firms over the past six years. Copies of the Progress Report and the news 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 elected officials, State Bar leaders, and members of the local judiciary.

The HBAA and the ABLA are committed to helping Austin law firms increase the hiring and retention of minority lawyers, and have pledged to continue issuing their annual report card.

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