

For immediate release

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Local law firms graded on hiring of minority attorneys

The Hispanic Bar Association of Austin (HBAA) and the Austin Black Lawyers Association (ABLA) today issued a report card grading the hiring of minority lawyers by Austin's largest law firms. New this year is a Progress Report comparing grades received by the law firms over the last four years.

According to figures compiled by the HBAA and the ABLA, of 1,128 attorneys employed by the 25 largest law firms in Austin, 131—or 11.6 percent—are minorities.

“Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark decision recognizing the value of diversity in law schools. The members of the HBAA and the ABLA believe the rationale behind Justice O'Connor's opinion is just as relevant to law firms in Austin, in Texas, and across the country,” said HBAA President Amy Castañeda. “With a state that is almost 50 percent minority, it is important to have lawyers in law firms who reflect the race and ethnicity of our population.”

According to the State Bar of Texas, only 12.9 percent of the 71,170 attorneys in Texas are Hispanic, African American, Asian or Native American. In Travis County, just 11 percent of licensed attorneys are minorities.

Using the statewide average as a guide, the HBAA/ABLA report card awarded an “A” grade to Austin law firms with 13 percent or more minority lawyers. The following law firms received the highest grades:

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A+

- Andrews & Kurth LLP
- Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollen, Kever & McDaniel LLP
- Jenkins & Gilchrist
- Winstead Sechrest & Minick PC

A

- Brown McCarroll LLP
- Clark, Thomas & Winters
- Davis & Wilkerson
- Gray, Cary, Ware & Freidenrich
- Hilgers & Watkins

A-

- Locke, Liddell & Sapp LLP
- Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich & Rosati

Two law firms—Graves, Dougherty, Hearon & Moody, with 3.6 percent minority lawyers, and Scott, Douglass & McConnico, with 4.9 percent minority lawyers—received failing grades. Six law firms received a “B” grade, three law firms received “C” grades and three law firms received a “D” grade.

The report card grades law firms’ efforts in increasing and promoting diversity among lawyers at their firms. Grades of “E” for Excellent, “S” for Satisfactory and “U” for Unsatisfactory were awarded for law firm activities such as participating in minority job fairs, providing mentors for minority law school students, establishing a committee within the firm to promote diversity, including minorities in the firm’s Recruitment Committee and providing scholarships for minority law students. Nine law firms received a grade of “Excellent” for their minority hiring efforts, twelve firms received an “S” and four law firms’ efforts were deemed to be “Unsatisfactory.”

This year, the HBAA and ABLA added a Diversity Progress Report showing the grades received by Austin law firms over the past four years. “The Progress Report is a great addition to our annual Report Card evaluation because it shows which law firms are making progress in hiring and retaining minority lawyers,” observed ABLA President-Elect Brian Jammer. “Conversely, it helps us see which law firms continue to make no progress in the area of diversity,” he added.

The Hispanic Bar Association of Austin and the Austin Black Lawyers Association reiterated their commitment to help Austin law firms increase their hiring and retention of minority lawyers, and the HBAA and ABLA pledged to continue issuing their annual report card.

Copies of this news release, the Report Card and the Diversity Progress Report also will be sent to local and state elected officials, State Bar leaders and members of the local judiciary.

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