

## Franklin advocates for social justice, works to increase minorities in law profession



*Harold Franklin, partner and diversity chair, King & Spalding LLP*

By Tammy Joyner – Contributing Writer, Atlanta Business Chronicle

11/13/20

During his tenure as president of Gate City Bar Association, Atlanta’s oldest black attorneys group, Harold Franklin Jr. worried about the declining numbers of minorities entering the law profession.

“I wanted to change that,” Franklin recalled.

So in 2007, Franklin created the Benham Law Camp, a three-week, comprehensive immersion into the field of law for high school students of color. Students participated in mock trials, interned at a law firm or judge’s office and were exposed to attorneys who spoke to camp participants. The camp is named after retired Justice Robert Benham, the first Black to serve on the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Since then, hundreds of students have attended the camp, which is a partnership of Gate City, Georgia State University’s College of Law and law firm King & Spalding, where Franklin is a partner who does product liability litigation and diversity chair.

“We’re seeing great success stories,” said Franklin, an Outstanding Voice honoree in the 2020 Atlanta Business Chronicle Diversity and Inclusion Awards. “They’re now practicing lawyers or in law school.”

In addition to his law practice and overseeing King & Spalding’s diversity initiatives, Franklin has worked for two decades with Election Protection, a non-partisan national organization run by the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.



---

*Carmen Toledo*

“He deserves every award there is because he truly gives so much of his time to diversity and inclusion issues,” said Franklin’s colleague Carmen Toledo, a King & Spalding partner who specializes in toxic tort, environmental and product liability litigation, who nominated him for the award. “He has done so much for the firm and the Atlanta legal community.”

Franklin says his work in the field of diversity is even more meaningful and important in today’s climate of social unrest and protests over racial injustice.

“Our effort this year is much more involved than it has ever been,” he said. “The interest in voting and turnout is unprecedented and the need for this type of pro bono effort is more important than ever. You’re talking about preventing discrimination and disenfranchisement. So they’re heavily related to diversity and inclusion.”

When national protests began earlier this year, Toledo said, Franklin didn’t sit idly by.

“Harold’s swift response following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery is telling,” said TaCara Harris, a senior associate at King & Spalding. “He immediately ignited a call for action within the firm.”

Emphasizing the urgent social justice needs in the community, Franklin encouraged fellow lawyers to engage by partnering with advocacy and pro bono organizations, she said. He mined his contacts at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the ACLU, Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and the American Bar Association.

Franklin’s passion for diversity and inclusion grew out of his upbringing by educator parents. His father taught math in the Atlanta public school system. His mother left education and later became an entrepreneur after Franklin and his brother came along.

“She had the entrepreneurial bent like her father, who was the first Black to own a taxi cab company in Atlanta,” he said.

Franklin’s mother grew up with Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. She also grew up next door to civil rights activist Vernon Jordan, who served as a close adviser to former President Bill Clinton.

“She was really a trailblazer in the Atlanta community,” Franklin said of his mother who died seven years ago. “She instilled in me the importance of giving back and giving a lot in the civic community.”

His parents’ teaching regularly shows up in his work and mentoring relationships at work. “One thing he does very well in his role as diversity partner is he takes time to meet with every diverse associate in the firm,” Toledo said.

Franklin mentored Harris in developing her trial and global disputes practice in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries, and checked in on her personally, she said.

The legal profession has lagged behind other professions in terms of diversity and inclusion, according to Franklin. “We’re focused on how we change that and foster and increase diversity within our ranks.”

King & Spalding in recent years has significantly increased the percentage and number of diverse and women attorneys at the firm, summer associates as well as partners joining the firm, Franklin said.