

LAW FIRM OF THE YEAR FINALIST:

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DAILY REPORT
2023 SOUTHEASTERN
LEGAL AWARDS

PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE



Harold Franklin Jr. of King & Spalding in Atlanta.

Atlanta-based King & Spalding was honored for making “diversity and inclusion ... integral components of [the firm’s] culture and growth,” according to its nominator essay.

Founded in 2020, King & Spalding’s Diversity Mentoring & Sponsorship Program supports the development of its diverse attorneys and enhances our retention efforts. The initiative matches diverse mid-level associates with partners and incorporates one-on-one and group mentoring sessions and career development programs. This year’s program includes more than 100 mentor/mentee pairs, more than double

the amount since the program’s inception.

“As the legal profession endeavors to accelerate progress in increasing diversity, enhancing the firm’s focus on efforts to retain diverse talent has become a key strategy for gaining momentum in our D&I strategy,” the essay said.

The Daily Report asked King & Spalding the following questions, and they were answered by firm diversity chair Harold Franklin Jr., the Atlanta office managing partner:

What are your proudest accomplishments in the area of diversity and inclusion in law?

The firm has an enhanced focus on the retention of diverse and women lawyers, and we are very proud of our recent initiatives that further that goal. One of those key efforts is the Diversity Mentoring and Sponsorship Program, for which the firm is nominated in this category. One thing that separates the program from others is the focus on sponsorship in addition to mentorship; partner sponsors are expected to advocate for the success and advancement of their associate mentees through increased access to leadership opportunities, through

connections and facilitated networking, and within the evaluation and promotion process. We launched this innovative program in early 2020. We were undaunted by the pandemic and determined to implement this program despite the challenges of unexpected remote work and a virtual environment. We have really poured resources into this program, and with more than 200 total mentors and mentees now participating, year four is our largest group of participants yet.

Additionally, the firm invests in our diverse and women lawyers through programs like our Diverse Lawyers Retreat and Women Associates Coaching Program. The Diverse Lawyers Retreat brings together racially/ethnically diverse and/or LGBTQ+ lawyers from offices around the world. The most recent retreat, held in-person in Atlanta in November 2022, saw more than 160 lawyers participate, including 50+ partners. The sessions included panel discussions and small group meetings about career development, and networking sessions like speed mentoring and dinners at partners' homes.

The firm is also in the second year of a leadership development and executive coaching program for midlevel women associates. This cohort-driven program includes group sessions, partnered facilitated discussions, and

one-on-one executive coaching sessions.

Each of these programmatic initiatives are designed to positively impact retention. We are not about checking boxes—we want to be sure that what we are doing is meaningful, practical and valued by the participants, which is why we seek their feedback in real time and enhance our programming to make sure it's having the intended effects. We are encouraged by recent trends and progress in this space and believe that these initiatives and others we've implemented in recent years have been a key contributor to a 36% increase in diverse lawyers, including a 58% increase in diverse associates, specifically, at the firm since 2018. In that time, the firm has also increased our women partners by 38% and our women associates by 34%. We are encouraged by recent progress, but we know we will need to continue to invest heavily in these efforts to build upon this momentum of progress going forward.

What are the greatest diversity and inclusion-related challenges today for Georgia lawyers and firms?

With regard to minorities, the legal profession has struggled to retain outstanding diverse talent. While the profession has made significant strides in identifying

and recruiting outstanding diverse layers, a key challenge has been retention. Achievements in diversity are to be lauded, but the data reflect that sustaining that progress is more challenging. For example, according to a February 2021 ABA Model Diversity Survey Report, the overall attrition rate at primarily larger firms was almost three times higher for African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino attorneys than for white attorneys. The attrition rates for Asian and Multiracial attorneys were also significantly higher than for their white peers. In my view, the most significant progress in increasing diversity and inclusion will come from sustained gains in the retention of outstanding diverse talent.

Ultimately, in any professional services organization or profession in which there is a significant degree of subjectivity in assessing achievement and talent, retention will depend largely on lawyers from underrepresented groups feeling that: 1) they belong, 2) they are regarded as part of the fabric of their places of work, and 3) that they have meaningful opportunities (commensurate with their non-diverse peers) for progression and success. Without these, affected lawyers will seek opportunities elsewhere instead of investing in their current workplace with little confidence there will be a return.

In my candid conversations with underrepresented lawyers, many have told me that the absence of mentoring and meaningful relationships with lawyers who can positively impact their careers was a key reason they decided to look for positions elsewhere. The data confirms this anecdotal evidence; a 2020 report by NALP analyzed data from more than 20,000 associate departures between 2012 and 2018. The three common reasons minority associates chose to leave their law firms were: 1) they felt isolated, 2) they lacked meaningful guidance, and 3) they were deprived of professional development opportunities.

As a profession, we must commit to being intentional and specific in our efforts to ensure that opportunities for growth, development, access to key assignments and client contact are extended to diverse lawyers to the same degree as with their non-diverse peers. While the law firm model (for large firms at least) is not designed for most lawyers who start to ultimately stay and advance, we must endeavor to ensure that to the extent diverse lawyers chose to leave, that they are doing so for the same reasons as their non-diverse peers and not for reasons related to their diversity.

Culture-building is key. Resources that build an environment and culture of inclusion and belonging,

such as affinity groups, career coaching, implicit bias training, allyship, client development opportunities and mentoring/sponsorship programs are examples of retention focused efforts that can help move the needle. While pipeline recruitment efforts will remain integral for long-term success, retention is where the rubber meets the road.”

Who have you found to be particularly inspirational in implementing successful diversity initiatives?

[I know] the incredible impact that effective mentorship can have on career development for diverse lawyers. When asked about an individual who has inspired him in championing initiatives that grow diversity within the legal profession, [my] response is—Justice Robert Benham.

Justice Benham was the first African American appointed to the Georgia Supreme Court. He had an incredibly impressive and groundbreaking career, but those of us that know him personally know how he genuinely cares about reaching back and mentoring others. He has demonstrated an inspiring path for all lawyers, including lawyers of color, to see themselves in leadership positions in the law. He not only mentored numerous diverse lawyers throughout his career, but he instills the importance of mentorship in helping bring the next generation along.

[I have] been heavily engaged in mentoring others throughout his legal career, [and I] wanted to use his platform during his tenure as president of the Gate City Bar Association to make a difference by creating opportunities for deserving high-school students to gain exposure to the legal profession. During my tenure as president of the Gate City Bar Association, I wanted to create an institutional program that would encourage and empower young people to pursue a career in the legal profession and to see, by way of example, other diverse lawyers who became successful despite the odds. In recognition of Justice Benham’s mentorship and example, [I] named the program after Justice Benham.

The Justice Robert Benham Law Camp is now in its 17th year and is a partnership between the Georgia State University School of Law, Gate City Bar Association and King & Spalding. The three-week intensive program includes sessions on legal fundamentals, daily visits by a Lawyer of the Day to provide words of inspiration, LSAT preparation, a mock trial, and an internship at a law firm, with a judge, or in a corporate legal department. Many of the past students have gone on to attend law school and become successful practicing attorneys.