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The Future of Diversity and Inclusion in the Phila. Legal Profession

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Special to the Legal

For over a decade, the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group (PDLG) has been committed to fostering participation of a more diverse group of lawyers in the Greater Philadelphia region in order to make our legal profession stronger, more productive and better equipped to address the challenges of the 21st century. To effectuate its mission, the PDLG has created programming to enhance the recruitment and retention of lawyers of diverse backgrounds by law firms and corporate law departments in this region. These efforts, which include identifying, selecting, recruiting, training, developing and retaining diverse, talented lawyers, are accomplished by the PDLG's consortium law firms and law departments, who also comprise the PDLG's board of directors.

The PDLG started with 10 of the city's largest and most prestigious law firms and two corporate legal departments. Initially, the plan was to establish a nonprofit corporation that would create a registry of diverse lawyers and law students seeking positions in Philadelphia and of volunteer



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mentors for diverse lawyers. In addition, the corporation was to serve as a resource center for educational programs and strategies for increasing diversity and inclusion as well as to promote Philadelphia as a great place for diverse lawyers to work. The PDLG has since grown to 35 member organizations, which include 23 law firms and 12 law departments. Although the registry was never developed, the PDLG has grown to become a vibrant organization. Our mission and size have expanded over the last decade, and we hope to continue growing the PDLG to serve our diverse legal community.

Each of the past PDLG presidents has further refined the mission of the organization

during her or his tenure. As the incoming co-presidents of PDLG, we are grateful for the efforts, dedication and leadership of our immediate past co-presidents, Danielle Banks and Lilton Taliaferro, whose efforts culminated with an overwhelmingly successful 10th anniversary celebration of the founding of the PDLG and the creation of the inaugural "Ring of Champions," a program designed to help member firms address the issue of mentoring and retaining diverse attorneys. Banks and Taliaferro's leadership has also helped to position the PDLG on sound financial ground for years to come. It is with great gratitude and appreciation that we thank them for a job well done.

We are also mindful of the energy and commitment of former president Vernon Francis, whose leadership helped with the development and implementation of the specialty pipeline programs, such as the Law School Boot Camp for newly-admitted diverse law students; the Exam Prep Program for first-year diverse law students preparing for their initial law school exams; and the programming for the general legal community, including two symposia: "The Norris Law Firm and the Liacouras Committee" and "Let's Not Wait

for the World to Change: What Women of Color Can Do to Combat Barriers to Advancement.” Likewise, we are inspired by the vision of the founding president, Nolan Atkinson, whose efforts led to the growth of the organization and the creation of PDLG’s flagship Summer 1L Program, which provides diverse students completing their first year of law school with the opportunity for summer law jobs with PDLG member firms and law departments. Many of these students have subsequently been hired as associates at our member firms and at least one has joined the legal department of one of our member corporations. More recently, we have developed additional initiatives to make our programming even more impactful. For years, we focused primarily on working with talented diverse law students through our Boot Camp, Exam Prep and Summer 1L programs, but we thought it important to expand our emphasis to focus as well on the ongoing success of the talented diverse lawyers who have joined our member firms. This past November, we piloted a program targeting new associates that provided advice from successful senior practitioners on how to excel in the law firm setting. This program was open to all new diverse associates, regardless of whether they had previously participated in our signature Summer 1L Program.

We also launched a social media initiative that we hope will make the PDLG more accessible not only to the sizeable PDLG alumni network we have cultivated over the last 10 years, but also to the broader legal community, and particularly to the next generation of diverse lawyers. Through the social media campaign, we

hope to provide a platform for organization and engagement that will further encourage our alumni and others to continue working toward accomplishing the goals of the PDLG.

We hope to create additional recruitment, retention, pipeline and educational programs for law students, new associates, laterals and partners.

However, none of this would have been possible without the unfettered dedication and tireless efforts of Lois Kimbol, vice-president of programs, and a number of dedicated board members. They have worked diligently over the years to ensure the quality and integrity of the programming offered by the PDLG and to continually update the programming so that it is current and relevant for our member organizations.

While we recognize and celebrate the PDLG’s successes under the tutelage of our past presidents, we are also mindful of the fact that the state of diversity within the law firms of Philadelphia still leaves much to be desired. We are encouraged that the overall number of diverse attorneys at area law firms appears to be trending upward, but we also recognize that progress has been slow and that there is much more to be done. To that end, the PDLG has initiated a strategic planning process that will help us, over the next few years, to target our goals and our audience

with greater precision and with improved and expanded programming.

We remain committed to the advancement of inclusion and diversity in our profession, specifically to developing best practices on issues relating to the hiring, retention and promotion of diverse attorneys within our member organizations and throughout the Greater Philadelphia region. We intend to continue to monitor these issues closely.

As we look even further ahead into the future of the PDLG and at our strategic planning process, we hope to create additional recruitment, retention, pipeline and educational programs for law students, new associates, laterals and partners. We also hope to strengthen our relationships with our diversity partners within the affinity bar associations and with the Philadelphia Bar Association, as well as to cultivate new relationships with other regional and national organizations whose missions include promoting diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Moreover, we hope to capitalize on these relationships and resources to become the repository of information on diversity and inclusion in the Greater Philadelphia legal community.

We are optimistic and enthusiastic about the future of our profession and are honored to serve in such an important leadership role as we continue to advance toward our diversity and inclusion goals. •