

## MEMORANDUM

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TO: Sylvia James, NALP Vice-President for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion  
and DEI Section Board Liaison

FROM: Laké Laosebikan-Buggs  
LaNitra S. Webb  
NALP 2025-26 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Section Co-Chairs

DATE: June 26, 2025

RE: DEI Section Quarterly Board Report #1

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Section had an active first quarter, including a post-Annual Education Conference (AEC) meeting on May 1, 2025 with 28 participants, and our Q1 meeting on June 5<sup>th</sup> with 29 participants. We welcomed Co-Chair Laké Laosebikan-Buggs to Section leadership and we thanked Immediate Past DEI Section Chair, Jennifer Mencarini, for her contributions to the success of the Section last year.

A summary of our recent meetings follows:

**AEC Section Meeting:** Approximately 25 members joined the 7am session, and as they arrived, we asked their personal walk-on songs and played snippets on a Bluetooth speaker to keep the energy high given the hour. (The songs were later circulated as a Spotify playlist to attendees.) Rather than conduct a business-as-usual session during the height of the anti-DEI Executive Orders and EEOC letters, we opted to conduct an open forum where all attendees introduced themselves and shared one thing on their minds. Many were stressed and anxious about their jobs and the work ahead. We concluded the meeting with a visualization exercise as members stood back-to-back supporting one another while they reflected on the support they give and receive. The exercise was adapted by outgoing Well-being Champion Melanie Rowen from the work of Niyonu Spann, an organizational development consultant and the founder of Beyond Diversity 101.

**1 May 2025:** During this meeting, we conducted Section business that was not addressed at the AEC. Laké opened the meeting with a well-being activity, we recognized outgoing Vice Chairs, solicited interest for vacant roles, and ideated potential AEC, Professional Development Institute, and Bulletin+ topics as follows:

- The impact of renaming diversity functions on the culture of an org/firm
- How to pivot professionally when the external environment shifts (e.g. using data to understand and improve work allocation or attorney performance, rather than using data to respond to client surveys)
- Cognitive dissonance of advising students in the Trump 2.0 era
- Reshaping recruiting programs to meet this moment
- When and how to communicate vs. dissociate

- Addressing the impacts of law firm decisions (in response to EOs/EEOC letters) on law student advising
- How to advise students/lead teams when your mental health is depleted
- Adapting identity-specific programs to meet the needs of broader audiences

**5 June 2025:** Our new Well-being Champion, Nada Llewellyn, invited members to listen and reflect on the words of Audre Lorde as she recited the poem, “A Litany for Survival.” Guest speaker Dr. Carla Fullwood facilitated a session on “Courageous COMMITment in the Legal Profession.” Grounded in La'Wana Harris' COMMIT model from Diversity Beyond Lip Service, the engaging session provided space for DEI and DEI-adjacent professionals to reflect, realign, and reenergize their purpose.

Our Q2 meeting will be held on Thursday, August 21, 2025 at 3pm ET / 12pm PT.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING**

**Anti-DEI Environment:** This is a challenging moment for NALP members who work in, or at the intersection of, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion given the recent targeted attacks on law firms and educational institutions by the current administration. Those in the U.S. have dealt with these challenges most acutely, but it also impacts members outside the U.S., to the extent they have operations or constituents here. In advance of the AEC, several members in Canada made it known that they would be unable to attend the conference as a result of the trade war and/or border crossing concerns (e.g., tech device review, threat of potential detainment, or threat of not being permitted entry after the financial and time investment).

During the Section meeting at the AEC, several school members noted significant funding from the U.S. government was a threat to their institution’s continued existence and, by extension, their employment.

If NALP has not already developed a plan to support members in transition with resources (e.g., job bank, resume review, coaching, etc.), this is something the Board may wish to consider.

**AEC 2026/Florida:** NALP members, particularly those in the LGBTQ+ community and those who work in DEI, have expressed concerns about the Florida location given Gov. DeSantis’ explicit attacks on LGBTQ+ rights and anything painted with the “woke” ideology brush. While some are committed to representing their identities and supporting local equity-seeking businesses while in attendance, others are fearful of what traveling to Florida may mean for them. While the LGBTQ+ and Gender Nonbinary Inclusion workgroups, as well as the DEI Section, can offer support, messaging from NALP leadership that recognizes the concern and proactively communicates activities that are being conducted to support equity-seeking organizations in Florida, or resources available to impacted members, would be immensely helpful for those are feeling unwelcomed in the state.

## **WORK GROUP UPDATES:**

**Annual Education Conference/*Bulletin*+ Article and Webinar Planning**

Vice Chair: **Ray English**, Senior Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Snell & Wilmer

The recent negative discourse surrounding DEI has had a chilling effect on article submissions, creating an atmosphere where even submitting an article can feel like a treasonous act or one likely to garner negative internal or external attention (i.e. potential risk for the individual and/or their organization). Several article ideas were generated during the May DEI Section meeting as previously noted; however, no one in the DEI Section has submitted an article to date.

Given the current climate, we might want to consider a more targeted strategy for next quarter. One idea could be to contact past contributors and invite them to offer additional context or insight on previously published content.

The new Black Men of NALP sub-affinity group held its first meeting in June and they are ideating to submit articles for the NALP Bulletin+ as well as proposals for next year's AEC.

### **Disability & Neurodiversity Inclusion**

Vice Chairs: **Beka Anardi**, Senior Recruiter, Davis Wright Tremaine LLP and **Marti McCausland** Assistant Director, Center for Career Planning & Professional Development, University of Oregon School of Law

The group kicked off the new year with a meeting in May. After the success of the Bookmarked webinars last year, the Disability and Neurodivergence Work Group will host "Bookmarked, Part 3: Narratives of Disability and Neurodiversity" in the fall of 2025. Work group members will meet to discuss three new books.

The work group continues its plans to develop a resource containing interviews with attorneys and legal recruiting administrators who are disabled or neurodivergent to gain a better perspective on how they work best and how they have worked with their employers. The group is currently interviewing volunteers and will be consolidating the advice and creating the resource for NALP members in the coming year.

Finally, the work group is writing a *Bulletin+* article featuring one of our own members, Aaron Baer, and his experience as a legal professional with neurodiversity.

### **Gender Non-Binary Inclusion**

Vice Chair: **Deshawn Cook**, Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator, Williams & Connolly

Deshawn has been in contact with Chris Neal and Kyle Elliott about the seeking a Co-Chair to the Gender Non-Binary Inclusion workgroup. Based on community feedback, many people need support, want to better understand their rights, and potentially need assistance navigating less sympathetic spaces. If the working group is able to tackle a fraction of this, they would deem it a success. They are aiming to organize a webinar in the near future to address these topics.

### **LGBTQ+**

We are actively seeking a Vice Chair to fill this vacancy.

### **Native and Indigenous Peoples in the Legal Profession**

Vice Chair: **Jennifer Mencarini**, Director of Cultural Engagement, Fox Rothschild

The first resource that the original Task Force created, a guide for law school career services offices working with Native and Indigenous students, has been published by NALP. Jen is in the process of finalizing the second resource that the prior Task Force created – a glossary of terms – and hopes it will be published prior to the next Board report. Additionally, Jen plans to attend and support the Cutting Sign Conference for Native and Indigenous law students at the University of Utah S.J. Quinney School of Law.

### **Well-Being Champion**

Champion: **Nada Llewellyn**, Chief Inclusion Officer, US, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer (US) LLP

During the June Section meeting, Nada invited attendees to reflect on the words of Audre Lorde in her poem, “A Litany for Survival.” It resonated most deeply, given the current environment, when Nada recited: “...when we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent we are still afraid. So it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive.”